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QUEER CHUMS.



There we stood, the centre of a hundred curious eyes.—p. 151.

QUEER CHUMS:

BEING A NARRATIVE OF
A MIDSHIPMAN'S ADVENTURES AND ESCAPES
in Eighteen hundred and——war-time.



24-56

BY
CHARLES H. EDEN,

AUTHOR OF

"AUSTRALIA'S HEROES," "PHILIP VANDALEUR'S VICTORY," ETC.

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PREFACE.

I WISH to say, that whilst there is much that may appear fanciful in this little romance, it is nevertheless founded chiefly on fact that has come under the writer's own observation. The 'Sussex Pad' still occupies its former position—a new house on an old spot—whilst both Old and New Shoreham still rear smart sailors for our fleet.

No portion of either the mutiny on board the *Antigone* nor her audacious recapture is either imaginary or exaggerated. History has been faithfully followed in narrating this splendid enterprise, the only particular in which, for the purposes of my story, I have gone wrong being the killed on the British side during the engagement. Actually our loss

was confined to twelve men wounded. Any one conversant with the annals of the British Navy will find no difficulty in putting correct names to the frigates in question, and a date to the achievement itself.

I may add, that on board H. M. S. *Swift*—the vessel which took Smith O'Brian to Australia—there was a pet bear, which used to wrestle with the men, and was treated as one of themselves by the crew.

CHARLES H. EDEN.





INTRODUCTION,

WRITTEN BY

REAR-ADMIRAL SIR GEORGE POWERSCOURT,
BART., K.C.B.

I FIND that boys now-a-days are just as curious as their predecessors were some forty years ago, when I and my brothers wore short jackets, with a grand spread of turn-down collar, and used to tease our grandfather to tell us stories of his early life. These we received in such shreds and patches, and in such nautical language—the dear old man dragged in the sea phrases to please us!—that it was difficult to piece the disjointed fragments together, when the happy thought occurred to us that the veteran might be persuaded to write

his adventures, to which proposal, after much pressing, he consented, bargaining only that he was to set about it in his own fashion, and tell a plain sailor story in a plain sailor fashion. He kept his word faithfully, and in the present volume will be found the history of his earlier career; other MSS. in my possession deal with the remainder.

Now I, like my dear old grandfather, am a sailor, and when my sons—and daughters too, for that matter—collect round my knees in the evening just when I want a game at whist, or a quiet doze, and pester me for stories of *my* early life, I begin faintly to realize the intolerable nuisance that I and my brothers must have appeared to *our* old Admiral.

If we were—and judging from my own experience I feel certain of it—the dear old man never showed it, but bore our silly interruptions and foolish questions with inexhaustible patience, looking fondly at us with those mild

blue, eyes, which could harden to steel at any tale of meanness, cowardice, or tyranny.

Although the course of years has made me a flag-officer, yet the age in which my lot has been cast cannot be regarded as a brilliant one in our naval history. I dare say we should not have discredited our cloth if the opportunity had presented itself; but years of peace, broken only by the Crimean War, in which our ships took little part, closed to the navy all chances of distinction. For this cause my career has been an uneventful one when compared with the stirring episodes to be found in my grandfather's narrative; so when my youngsters nightly besieged me for 'yarns'—as they were pleased to entitle my prosaic maunderings—the idea occurred to me of printing the well-thumbed manuscript, which the old man so laboriously jotted down, for the benefit of another generation, which may be yearning to avenge the death of Nelson; and I can only

say, that if it amuses the high-pressure boys of the present age as much as it did us forty years ago, my dear old grandfather will not have recalled his early days in vain.

On the reception of this instalment by my youngsters depends the publication of the remaining MSS.

(*Signed*) GEORGE POWERSCOURT.

Gorham Hall, Sussex.

April 1887.





QUEER CHUMS.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNTIMELY VISITOR.

THE snow that fell ceaselessly to the ground, covering the whole face of nature with a white mantle, made the stillness of that mid-winter evening more remarkable. It was rarely that travellers passed through our quiet hamlet, and after sundown the whole country-side seemed to slumber, the silence broken only by the distant bark of a shepherd's dog, the measured beat of oars in the rowlocks, or the sound of hoofs that hurried past and were lost to hearing in the distance of the pathless Downs. To me, a child, the true meaning of these signs of life was not yet apparent; but I remarked how my father would look up from his books to check me in my boyish desire to see the horsemen whose

movements were audible without, and I still remember how his long white fingers would drum aimlessly upon the table until the last hoof-beat had died away, and silence had again fallen on the village. Sometimes I ventured to question him concerning the errand on which these mysterious riders were bound, and why they always chose the darkest nights in the month for their purpose; but my father never could be induced to gratify my curiosity; and, daring though I was, there was a quiet authority in all that he did which awed me, and prevented any attempts to solve the riddle by such an illegitimate method as questioning the villagers, although, had I done so, I cannot think that their replies would have brought with them much enlightenment.

For the last twenty-four hours the snow had fallen heavily, and the flat land around the mouth of the Adur presented a more than usually melancholy appearance; whilst the Downs in the rear looked like vast sheeted sepulchres. Through the rift in the range a keen north wind whistled remorselessly, shrieking over the scattered cottages and stout church tower of Old Shoreham, and making many a French and English lugger cruising off the coast lower her sails or put her helm up to avoid the fury of the

blast. But with the sinking of the sun the boisterous wind had greatly diminished, although now and again a squall swept moaning through the gap, and in the intervals a deadly silence prevailed, a silence so complete as to be almost painful.

It was eight o'clock at night, my father was poring over his books, or with fixed eyes gazing into the fire lost in thought, and oblivious of me and my doings; whilst I was shaping a fresh trigger to my cross-bow with the new knife that burly Jack Cheesman, the jolly landlord of the 'Sussex Pad,' had given me the week before as a Christmas present. This snow would make the birds very tame, I reflected, and perhaps by careful stalking I should get a shot at a hoopoe or a brent goose, both of which birds visit our coast in winters of exceptional severity, and I was already prematurely savouring the triumph with which I should display the spoil, when a sudden sound rang through the air, closely followed by an exclamation from my father, both of which were so unexpected and startling that I dropped the wood in my hand, and narrowly avoided slicing off a finger to keep it company.

"Hush! what can that mean?" exclaimed my father, more to himself than with any expectation of my explaining.

"Most likely Jim Turnbull out on the marshes after wildfowl," I replied; "he was at the 'Pad' to-day, and said he should make a bag if possible."

Whether the answer satisfied my father or not I cannot tell, but at any rate he applied himself once more to his book, whilst I resumed operations on my trigger, a little ashamed of the childish start I had given at the simple report of a distant fowling-piece—I, who had many times gone out with Jack Cheesman in his duck-punt, and listened unmoved to the bellowing roar of the great swivel gun with which the little craft was armed.

"You must be growing nervous, Frank, like old Peter Shingle at the bridge," I murmured to myself, when again the hapless piece of oak jumped out of my hand, together with the knife, both of which fell clattering to the floor, whilst I sprang to my feet with a sudden sense of impending danger, as a knocking, loud, hurried, and continued, was heard at our cottage door. Not a sound of approaching footsteps had heralded this boisterous summons, for the carpet of snow rendered all noiseless outside; without warning and quite unexpectedly it came, and I could distinguish through the thin partition the half-smothered scream and the pious ejaculations of our only servant, Martha, who had retired to

rest more than an hour before, being ignorant of both reading and writing, and therefore unable to keep at bay the drowsiness brought on by a day's hard work.

My father had also gained his feet, and now strode quickly to the door, his brows knit, but apparently less excited than when the shot had been fired a quarter of an hour before. I followed him with my eyes, though not with my feet ; for truth compels me to record that I was slightly frightened, and had a sneaking longing to escape to the protection of Martha's apron-string rather than face the importunate visitor, whose blows continued ceaselessly to reverberate through the cottage, and whom I strongly suspected of coming on no good errand at this unseemly hour. So I stood gaping after my father with the foolish little heart fluttering in my breast, but my ears very wide open withal, and at the age of twelve the hearing powers of a healthy boy are wonderful.

On reaching the front-door, my father paused before unbolting and unbarring—we carried stout oak doors and ponderous fastenings in those days—and hailed the untimely visitor, whose cudgel was beating the tattoo on our panel.

“ Who are you ? and what do you want at this hour ? ” he asked, and I remember that there was a quiet determination in his voice such as I

had never heard before, but which seemed immediately to give me courage and drive the poltroonery from my heart, and which had apparently a quieting effect upon the visitor, for the latter immediately ceased knocking, and cried out in a voice that I scarcely recognized at once, so agitated and broken were the tones, whether by excitement or hard running I am unable to say :

“Lord’s sake, Muster Powerscourt, open the door! There be a accident happened, and Joe Wrigglesworth he have been and shot a furriner. The poor chap is a dying up to the ‘Pad,’ and no one can’t understand his lingo, so Muster Cheesman he sends me, and he says will you be so kind as to come and interpret, and render easy the last hours of a dying man?”

“You have been up to some of your unlawful work again, eh, Sam?” asked my father sharply, whilst drawing his visitor into the cottage, and closing the door to keep out the biting cold. “Now, tell me all about it whilst I get ready,” he continued; “and you, Frank, fetch me my jack-boots, and beg Martha at the same time to leave off that torrent of ejaculations. We are not going to have the house burnt down over our heads to-night, so she has no cause for fear.”

Swiftly I sped away on my errand, spent but

little time in soothing poor Martha, but hurried back with the high funnel-shaped boots, in terror lest I should have missed a part of the story. I need have had no fear on that score, for Sam, the ostler, was as true a Sussex yokel as ever trod the thymy sward of his own Downs, and his mode of explaining an ordinary event was as cumbrous and circuitous as the language in which the narration was couched would have sounded barbarous and unintelligible to a stranger. To me, however, it had been familiar from childhood, but unfortunately the man had only opened his story when my father, having dragged on his thigh boots and thrown a great blue horseman's cloak over his shoulders, led the way to the door, saying, "Come, Sam, you can tell me the rest as we walk along."

This would never do ; my curiosity was roused to the highest pitch, and must, I felt, be satisfied at any cost. My father had taken no notice of me on leaving, though it could scarcely be supposed that he intended me to accompany him. My little breeches and woollen stockings were hardly the correct garments for a wintry January night, and at every step the snow would come over my low-quartered shoes. Moreover, in giving way to my curiosity I was doing what I distinctly felt to be wrong, and was taking

advantage of my poor father's mental preoccupation, which was little short of actual deceit, and was a mean action at the best. On the other hand, the temptation was overwhelming, for Sam would maunder out the story during the walk, and, best of all, I should see the 'Sussex Pad' at night, and perhaps find out the meaning of those mysterious hoof-strokes which so constantly resounded in the darkness through the village street. If my father noticed me and sent me back, so much the worse; but somehow I did not fancy that this would happen, and being of an adventurous disposition when spurred on by curiosity, my mind was made up in a moment, and gliding quietly through the door, I closed it gently behind me.

The snow was still falling and the night very dark, but twenty paces in advance I could see the rays of the horn stable-lantern carried by Sam, and a very small exercise of activity enabled me to catch my father and his guide, when I followed quietly and noiselessly in their rear, my light foot-falls unheard in the soft snow. Without the friendly light of that old tallow dip we should never have found our way over the bridge, but should have strayed into the deep frozen ditches, or even stumbled unawares into the Adur itself. At one point Sam stopped, and holding his

lantern over the parapet, pointed out to my father the dark stream that swirled and gurgled around the rotten wooden piles, where floating lumps of ice flashed back the rays of the flame.

“Takes a sharp eye and a stout heart to guide a heavily-laden boat through yon,” remarked Sam grimly, whilst jerking his lantern towards the sullen depths beneath. “Hullo! who’s this?” and with a dexterous dive for which I should never have given the clumsy fellow credit, he had caught me by the collar and dragged me to the light.

“Beg pardon, Muster Frank,” he muttered as I shook myself free, half angry, half glad at my betrayal by the bright brass buttons with which my little coat was profusely adorned; for the snow-covered road, the darkness, and the black current of the seething river had made me nervous, and I experienced an inexpressible relief at feeling the grasp of the hand which my father extended towards me.

“Have you followed us, Frank?” he asked in surprise. “You should have been in bed long ago, my lad. But come along now, there is no help for it.”

Onward we trudged through the darkness, even Sam’s local knowledge failing to keep him on the narrow road; for on two occasions he

floundered into the deep ditch which flanked the path on either side, but luckily without damage to the lantern. Not a word was spoken, except the vigorous expletives that arose from our guide when he stumbled—little outbreaks which were sternly reprimanded by my father—so that in stealing forth to gain information by the road I entirely failed in the object which I had in view. Now, however, the glimmer of lights could be seen in the distance, growing more and more distinct at each pace which we took in advance; and at length a rough voice was heard athwart the squall which at that moment swept down the valley of the Adur, forcing us to halt and turn our backs to the blast, and driving me between my father's knees, where I was in some measure sheltered by the skirt of the long cloak which reached nearly to the ground.

"Light, ahoy!" roared the voice; "heave to and answer, or I'll put a charge of slugs across your bows."

"Luck and a fair wind," shouted back Sam, but even at so critical a juncture, I remember it struck me that our guide's voice trembled somewhat, and the hand that grasped the lantern shook visibly. "Can a big grown man ever feel frightened?" I thought to myself, but this juvenile philosophy was swallowed up in wonder

as a figure joined us, also carrying a lantern, the rays of which fell upon the brass barrel of a huge bell-mouthed blunderbuss which lay in the hollow of his left arm, and upon the polished mountings of a brace of horse-pistols which were stuck in the sash round his waist.

Although close to us—almost touching Sam—this worthy continued as though the person addressed had been on the top of Chanctonbury Ring, roaring out in a voice which they could surely have heard at Lancing, “Right you are, my lad—no moon and a small helm. Follow me.”

In obedience to this enigmatical invitation we accompanied the speaker, and less than a minute found us at the entrance of the ‘Sussex Pad,’ with which house of call I was perfectly familiar by daylight, although I had never previously visited it after dark.





CHAPTER II.

AT THE 'SUSSEX PAD.'

IT was a strange scene which met our view. Holding tightly by my father's hand, I stared with awe and wonder at the rough crowd of men assembled in the spacious tap-room of the 'Pad,' of whom the individual with the blunderbuss, who had come forth to address us, appeared to be the captain or leader. Not that these rude fellows paid much heed to anybody or anything, as far as I could discover, but made themselves perfectly at home, lolling on the benches with long clay tobacco-pipes in their mouths, and calling for strong drink in language garnished by many ferocious and undesirable epithets. But that our companion had some influence over this turbulent crew was soon evidenced in the following manner.

Having fulfilled his mission by guiding us safely to the hostelry, Sam the ostler had quickly

disappeared, so that only my father and I accompanied the leader into the common tap-room. At our entry the babel of voices ceased as by magic, whilst twenty pairs of fierce eyes looked curiously and inquiringly out of tanned, weather-beaten faces, from which all expression, even that of ferocity, was taken away by the mass of hair which concealed mouth, chin, and cheeks. I stared at these unshorn desperadoes, through the cloud of tobacco-smoke which half enveloped them, with undisguised surprise, though with little apprehension, for the grasp of my father's hand gave me courage, and, looking up into his face, I saw that it wore a half-contemptuous smile, which in itself was sufficient to reassure me. Perhaps—for I was always somewhat given to mimicry, or 'jack-acting,' as we term it at sea—I attempted to mould my own features on the model of my father's, and to express the contempt manifested by his lips, and if so, like all imitators, I must have over-played the part, and thus given offence to one of the bearded men who sat near the fire, for he knitted his heavy brows into a dark scowl, and staring angrily at me, muttered in sullen tones, "What imp of darkness is this that the skipper has brought? Best send him out to join the foreign brat in the stable."

I felt my father's fingers tighten like a vice

round my wrist, but before he had time to answer this insolent fellow, our companion had sprung forward, seized the grumbler by the shoulders, dragged him from the seat, and with one vigorous heave had sent him staggering backwards until a bench caught his legs, over which he fell and lay doubled up amidst the mirth of the company, which must have added greatly to his mortification.

“Have you not done mischief enough for one night, Joe Wigglesworth?” roared Skipper Zebedee, for such I soon learnt was the strong man’s name. “You are only brave when an unarmed man or a child is before you. Don’t let me see any more of your ugly mug if this affair turns out badly, and meanwhile best stow your jawing tackle and sail small. Pass the word for Jack Cheesman,” he continued, “and you, sir,” addressing my father, “take this seat near the blaze, and warm the cockles of your heart with a rummer of mulled stingo.”

Both the warmth of the fire and the sip of spiced ale which I was permitted to take were much to my liking, and from the lee side of my father’s chair I took a thorough survey of the inmates of the tap-room, who had resumed their coarse and boisterous conversation, oblivious of the interruption caused by Joe Wiggles-

worth's misadventure. That luckless individual had gradually picked himself up from the floor and had glided quietly from the room when he thought no one was looking.

Most of the company were in seafaring dress ; not the spick-and-span apparel that I have seen worn by play-actors when taking a nautical part, but stout Flushing cloth trousers tucked into fisherman's boots, woollen guernseys, with mufflers round the neck of the same material, and thick pilot coats, or 'monkey-jackets,' as we more generally call them at sea. Round the waist of each was buckled a broad leather belt supporting a cutlass, and always one, sometimes a brace of pistols ; and this equipment gave rise to a feeling of admiration and envy on my part, for I had all a boy's ardent desire to play with fire-arms, and I would willingly have given everything that I possessed, even to the knife presented me on Christmas Day, for the privilege of calling myself owner of one of those clumsy flint-locked weapons, although it would not have been in reality half so destructive as the cross-bow which I had begun to despise.

Perhaps three-fourths of the company were seafaring men, whilst the remainder wore the long cloak, boots, and spurs of a horseman of the period ; and these were also armed, as I

could see on their stretching forth a hand for their rummers, when the action caused the light to glint upon the brass-mounted butts of their pistols. But what chiefly astonished me was the exceeding hairiness of all these gentry. Although we Britons have ever despised the frog-eating *Mounseers* as a nation of dancing-masters and barbers, we have in the main stuck to clean cheeks and smooth chins, looking down upon beards, moustaches, and such-like muzzle-lashings as the property of heathen Turks or pirates. Neither in our village nor in the town of New Shoreham would it have been possible to lay hand on any one, from the parson to the veriest long-shore loafer at the water-side, who sported more ornament on his face than the mutton-chop whisker that custom had made allowable ; so that when I saw these fierce faces staring out of a jungle of hair, my surprise was extreme ; for, with the exception of the five Spanish sailors whom our fishermen had rescued and brought ashore from a wreck the winter before, I had never seen bearded men in my life, and how these fellows could have entered our river and taken possession of the ' Pad ' without my either seeing them or hearing of their arrival—Martha's eyes are sharp, and the women-folk of both Shorehams terrible gossips—was a

perfect mystery. And yet somehow as I gazed at these hirsute monsters, the faces and particularly the voices of some of them seemed familiar. There was one chap, with a beard half a fathom long, and a peculiar fashion of winking with his left eye, whom I could have sworn to be Will Strong, waggoner to Squire Standish at Bramber ; but then Will had a face smooth as a cannon-shot, whilst this fellow was surrounded by a perfect forest of reddish tow. Then again the black-muzzled little seaman next to him had a laugh exactly like Tom Martin the fisherman, with the same awkward kink in his nose, for the possession of which its owner was never willing to account in a satisfactory manner.

However, these speculations were cut short by the entry of Jack Cheesman, the landlord, who, bending down over Captain Zebedee, whispered something in his ear, whereupon that gentleman, after draining his rummer to the dregs, arose, and beckoning my father to follow him, preceded us out of the room.

We were ushered into another low-roofed room—the house seemed full of them—of smaller size, and here Captain Zebedee spoke to my father in an undertone which prevented me from catching the meaning of the words uttered, for at a glance from the former I had

been sent to the window to see if it was snowing ; but youngster though I was, I could hardly fail to notice that the rough skipper's bearing was very respectful, and that he appeared in more awe of my father than his bulk, stature, or bristling girdle seemed to warrant.

"Very well," my father remarked at last in a louder tone ; "very well, I will do the best I can to patch the poor fellow up, but remember, Zebedee, that this is the last time I will ever stand between you and justice. That rascal Joe Wigglesworth has no business to be trusted with fire-arms. Give him a stout cudgel and he would not hurt a Southdown sheep, for his cowardly disposition would prevent him from approaching within arm's-length of the animal. Some day, when the fellow has sold you all, my advice will be remembered, for to save his own worthless neck he would see the whole gang . . ."

"Hush, sir, hush !" cried the skipper, laying his hand on my father's arm as he caught sight of my pale face peeping out from between the window-curtains, with staring eyes and mouth wide open in astonishment. "Best keep strong meat away from weak stomachs."

"You are right," answered my father, "so lead me at once to my patient. You can remain here, Frank, until I return." And with these

words both men quitted the room, and I was left alone.

Now I may remark that beyond a table, half-a-dozen chairs, and two or three ill-drawn woodcuts of ships, almost hidden from view under a mask of smoky dust, the little room contained nothing whatever likely to interest a boy, and one, moreover, who was gradually awakening to the fact that very unusual scenes were in progress round about him, and whose curiosity was fast becoming uncontrollable. The outlook from the window over the snowy fields and frozen marsh was far from exhilarating, and possessed no interest whatever; so I was speculating as to whether it would not be better to return to the common tap-room, in spite of the hairy banditti by whom it was crowded, when a voice, such as I had never heard before, rivetted my attention, and, if the truth must be confessed, made me tremble from head to foot. It was like no sound that I can describe in words—an impatient angry growl, swelling in volume and then dying away in a kind of low melancholy moan that was piteous to hear. For a moment I stood rooted to the spot on which the voice had surprised me, uncertain what to do or whither to fly; for the idea suddenly entered my head that a madman had escaped from the

large asylum in the Weald, and Martha had so often regaled me with accounts of the doings of these unfortunates, that every drop of blood in my veins seemed turned to water, and I stood motionless, shaking with terror.

This, however, was but for a minute, perhaps for only a few instants, since in situations of extreme mental tension, seconds appear drawn out to the length of hours, when without warning the growl and moan recommenced, this time immediately outside the window of my room, whilst at the same moment the rattling of a chain, accompanied by a loud scratching, became audible at the outer wall, as though the unhappy lunatic were striving to tear down the solid masonry with his nails.

"Help! help!" I cried feebly, staggering to the door, which luckily yielded immediately, otherwise I feel sure that terror would have affected my reason, and I pulled it to behind me and fled wildly into the depths of the 'Pad,' my mad flight accelerated by the crashing of glass telling me that the maniac had forced the window-frame, and was now probably in the very room which I had just quitted.

I imagine that my intention was to make for the common tap-room, for the very hairiest of those hairy men would have been welcomed as

a friend and protector in my present frame of mind ; but if so, the trepidation under which I was labouring caused me to miss the way, and take a passage leading to the rear of the building, where I found myself suddenly stopped, brought up all standing by what seemed a wall, but from which, curiously enough, there came a faint ray of light, proceeding apparently through a minute rift in the brickwork.

It must not be supposed that any reflections as to the cause of so peculiar a circumstance arose in my mind at this moment, or that it struck me as in any measure wonderful that a tallow candle should pierce a couple of feet of solid masonry. All the wonder and reflection came long afterwards, for I was just then in such overpowering anxiety to escape from my mad pursuer, and to reach a place of safety, that nothing would have appeared strange to me, and a cry of despair rose to my lips as I beheld, by the dim light of a distant swinging lamp, the massive and formidable obstacle which barred my further progress.

Escape was now impossible, and already my overstrained sense of hearing seemed to catch the sound of advancing footsteps. In an agony I glanced right and left. On either side were doors which I had passed in my flight, and

hurrying to these I tried the handles of each in the hope that one would yield, or that the room might be tenanted, and that my efforts would bring the inmate to the door to ascertain the business of the intruder. With all the strength of my small wrists I wrenched at the brass knobs, darting from one to the other, hoping against hope, and becoming every moment weaker from combined terror and physical exertion.

It was all in vain ; not a door gave, not a sign of movement was audible within these mystic chambers. With the calmness of despair I ceased rattling at the locks, and laid my ear gently against the panel to catch the very faintest sound that might arise ; but all was silent as the grave. Once I heard a faint pattering noise, and for a moment hope rose in the ascendant, as, putting my lips to the keyhole, I besought the inmate in the most moving language I could command to open the door of his apartment and grant the shelter I sought ; but this gleam of hope speedily became extinguished as the faint pattering gradually lessened, and finally died completely away.

"Rats !" I muttered, glancing around hurriedly, for again a noise had caught my ear, this time no chimera of an over-heated brain, but the stealthy shuffling 'pit-pat' of an advancing enemy

"Help! help!" I shrieked, or tried to shriek, for my parched tongue refused its office; and moved by the impulse which prompted me to place the greatest possible distance between myself and the madman, I rushed to the end of the passage from which the faint streak of light was still shining through the chink, thrust my fingers into the aperture in sheer desperation and pulled, when the solid brickwork swung noiselessly forward, revealing a dimly-lighted chamber.

Without an instant's hesitation I flung myself into this haven of safety and pulled the door to; it closed with a strong metallic 'click,' which I welcomed ungrudgingly as a safeguard against my foe.





CHAPTER III.

AN AWKWARD INTRUDER.

REMBLING in every limb, and with heart so loudly beating that I could hear its dull throbs, I stood beside the barrier of brickwork, and lent my small weight to the handle, as though the strength of a boy would assist in keeping the ponderous door closed. For several minutes all was silent in the passage which I had lately quitted, and my courage was beginning to reassert itself a little, when suddenly my watchful ear detected the same slow shuffling 'pit-pat' which had already driven me almost to frenzy with fear, and—horror of horrors!—the rattling of a chain was unmistakably mingled with the clumsy foot-fall, showing that the intruder must be the same as the unknown who had given vent to that hideous wail, and from whose appearance I had fled in terror.

Soon a strange noise reached me, as though this crazy visitor was endeavouring to ascertain my whereabouts by the sense of smell, for long whistling sniffs—resembling protracted grunts—came through the brickwork, and as these grew louder and louder I could almost fancy that I felt the hot breath of the lunatic through the rift in the masonry, and I clung to the handle in sheer desperation, faltering forth prayers for deliverance from a fate which now seemed inevitable, for once again my blood was frozen by that horrible cry which was but too familiar to my ear now, and, as before, accompanied by a scratching at the barrier—a heavy determined rasping, as though the foe were armed with talons of steel.

Many, very many years have passed by since the events occurred of which I am now writing, and the boyish form has changed into that of a weather-beaten old sailor with scanty locks of silver, and a rotundity of figure that it requires a sword-belt of formidable dimensions to girdle. During the fifty years that have elapsed since that January night—ay, 'tis half a century since!—it has been my lot, I may say my privilege, to travel the wide world round, that greater portion of it, at least, which is sheeted by the bright blue sea—that glorious ocean

within whose lullaby roar I was born, and which has been the joy of my manhood as it still remains the delight of my old age, for the dancing waves remain beautiful for ever, and to know them closely is to love them well. Under every clime I have served and suffered, from the frigid Arctic to the torrid equatorial belt, where the sun set the pitch bubbling in the seams and the white frocks of the crew became striped like the pelt of a zebra. In these wanderings my adventures have been numerous, and I have had pretty frequently to look death close in the face ; but although I have encountered as many dangers and endured as sore privations as most men, I may truly say that the remembrance of the moment when that panting savage was thirsting for my life remains standing out in bold relief as the most horrible experience it was ever my lot to meet. That I am alive still and able to write you this yarn of my boyhood shows that I escaped, but the adventure left its mark upon my whole life—a mark, I trust, productive of good rather than the reverse. You lads will smile—indeed I hope you will laugh heartily—at your old grandad's fright and bewilderment, but for him it can never wear a ludicrous aspect. The mind at twelve is plastic as softened wax to receive new impressions, but hard as solid

granite to retain them. No amount of reasoning will ever make me regard that moment otherwise than with awe, to which may be added a feeling of intense gratitude for the lesson then so forcibly brought home to me, and which has served to guide me throughout the various perils and vicissitudes of my chequered career.

And what lesson was this?—what mark was set upon my life? you will very naturally ask, and I will readily answer.

I, Frank Powerscourt, then received my first practical lesson in a truth which it behoves all men, and especially all mariners, to have deeply graven in their hearts. It is this:—"Never abandon hope in the goodness and mercy of God, however desperate your position may appear."

In many bitter straits this truth, which I hold as the sheet-anchor of a sailor's life, has since been made apparent to me, and its early recognition has saved me many a time from the temptation to abandon myself to despair, whilst teaching that as long as life lasts there is hope, and that to give way to despair is unmanly, cowardly, and unchristian. But you youngsters will, I feel sure, recognize this for yourselves without any urging from me. In jotting down the adventures of my early youth it is not my intention to preach a sermon, but to amuse, and,

whilst amusing, to let you see that the best path in life is the straight but narrow road of godliness, honour, and integrity, and that any deviation from it leads surely to sorrow on earth and destruction hereafter.

I find I have been guilty of deviation in the last page or two, but you lads must forgive the garrulity of an old man, and a few reflections produced entirely for your aid and guidance.

Suddenly both sniffing and scratching ceased, and a thrill of hope shot through me as I heard footsteps advancing along the flagged passage, not shuffling like the lunatic's, but still and stealthy, as though their wearer walked on tip-toe to lessen the heavy thud of the great sea-boots on his feet. The new-comer, from the swiftness with which he approached, was evidently unaware of the formidable personage already in possession of the corridor, and I was on the point of raising my voice in the meagre hope of conveying a warning, when suddenly I heard a stumble, accompanied by a deep but smothered imprecation, and followed by a sound so dreadful and unexpected that I dropped the handle of the door and hastily climbed up on a heap of kegs which stood at the entrance of this strange apartment. The noise was not very loud, but a deep ferocious grunt which could have

issued from the lungs of no human being, and this was immediately followed by a dull cracking sound, the meaning of which I was entirely at a loss to understand, even had fright permitted the free exercise of my reasoning faculties.

All the horrors of my situation were now intensified, for although I was unable to account satisfactorily for the noise, some instinct warned me that a terrible tragedy was occurring within only a few feet of the pile on which I was seated, whilst the unknown quality of the actors added to the tension of my feelings, and I stared around in a helpless bewildered kind of fashion, wondering vacantly what would take place next, and only anxious to hide my own diminutive carcase from any enemy who might enter my retreat. With this object in view I glanced hastily round the apartment in search of some more secure position than the exposed summit of a pile of brandy kegs, and soon espied at its further end a row of empty stalls, in each of which was placed a rack for forage. One of these receptacles was now half full of hay, and from its elevated position seemed to offer a noble hiding-place wherein my slender frame could find a safe harbour until relief came.

Although it seems long in description, yet in reality not thirty seconds elapsed from my first

discovering this haven to the moment when I had swung myself aloft into the projecting crib and nestled down amongst the hay, which I hastily disposed in such a fashion as to conceal me from the eyes of any intruder whom I had reason to believe meditated hostilities. With beating heart I lay curled up at the bottom of my perch, and whilst waiting for the next scene in this eventful drama, I had leisure to observe the strange retreat which Providence had provided for me in my dire necessity.

Any of you lads would have had little difficulty in arriving at a correct view of the uses to which this huge subterranean cavern was put, and of giving the right names to the kegs of spirits and bales of merchandise with which the place was filled, for you live in a more advanced age now, and the writers of boyish romance let you freely behind the scenes before you have reached your first decade. In my childhood there was no such plethora of juvenile literature as exists at present, and if things go on in the same progressive ratio, it will be a puzzle for the later Victorian novelists to invent scenes capable of awakening your interest and enthusiasm. When I was a boy, at the close of last century, we had no such literary treats as are provided for you favoured urchins by

Marryat, Hannay, Kingston, and many others, but had to confine ourselves to old 'Robinson Crusoe,' and the 'Adventures of Sandford and Merton.' The first-mentioned you lads despise as old-fashioned and not sufficiently exciting, and as for Thomas Day's masterpiece, I don't suppose you have ever seen the outside of it, or would even open the cover if you had. To me Harry, Tommy, and the estimable Mr. Barlow were living personages, and I could repeat pages from the book at this moment, deficient though my memory may be for events of recent date. And I am not sure whether we old-fashioned boys, fain to be satisfied with our bibles, school-books, and scanty amusing literature, were not better off than you young Sybarites of the present day, who have a host of fertile pens to cater for your wants, and mechanical toys to chase away dulness. Dulness! Why, we lads never knew the meaning of the term, and I will guarantee that I got more fun—ay, and did more execution—with my clumsy old cross-bow and its rough leaden bolts than George there will ever derive from the patent air-gun of which he is so proud. It is good for lads to be provided with innocent amusement until they are old enough to go to sea, but all the strained excitement they crave after now appears to me pernicious, and

calculated to destroy the zest of life before entering thoroughly into its pathway.

Yes, you boys would have cried in well-trained chorus, "It was the smugglers' hiding-place for their contraband goods into which poor old grandad had found his way, and the kegs were full of hollands and *eau-de-vie*, whilst the bales held silk and valuable lace. We have had the kind of place described a score of times by —, by —, by —. Why doesn't he get on and tell us something more exciting?"

Patience, my lads. You have worried the old man for his story, and now you have gained your wish you must at least concede this much to him—that he should tell it in his own fashion.

You would have been right in your conjecture concerning the uses to which this underground chamber was dedicated, although the truth entirely failed to strike me, for the simple reason that I had not the faintest notion of what smugglers or smuggling meant at that epoch of my existence.

As I now know, a deliberate system of defrauding the revenue was carried on throughout the whole coast-line of Kent and Sussex, and very few even of the magistracy could have shown a clean bill of health in that respect. But then no one but pig-headed gaugers ever thought of bestowing so opprobrious a name as 'smug-

gling' on the traffic by which half of them lived and the other half greatly benefited. 'Free-traders' sounded infinitely better than 'contrabandists,' if the name must be mentioned at all, but ordinarily a discreet silence was maintained; and this had been so effectual in my case, that no suspicion had ever been roused in my mind, neither should I have recognized any harm in it if I had seen files of horsemen flitting past, each with a brace of barrels slung over the saddle. Hence you boys must acquit me of want of penetration, and not exalt your own superior sagacity too much at your old grandfather's expense.

The room, or cavern, was of very considerable extent, running deep into the rising ground at the back of the 'Sussex Pad,' and so artfully contrived that the most suspicious preventive officer would have failed to discover its existence. Within it were stored the various descriptions of smuggled goods that proved most lucrative to the enterprising Free-traders, together with a multifarious assortment of old saddles, bridles, and other horsemen's gear, mixed confusedly with oars, nets, coils of rope, buoys for marking a flight of sunken tubs, grapnels, or creepers, for recovering the latter—in short, all the varied paraphernalia necessary to this illicit business.

All this I took in with wondering eye from

the security of my perch in the hay-rack, although I entirely failed to grasp its true meaning; but the quiet that reigned without was again broken by the same growl dying away into a piteous moan which had first alarmed me in the little room, and caused me to fly for shelter I knew not whither.

As my position in the crib was at a considerable distance from the brickwork entrance, the appalling sound was more subdued than when I had last heard it; but it was unmistakable to me, and I found new terror in the certainty that this hideous cry and the savage grunt of a few minutes past proceeded from the same cavernous lungs; but to what species of living animal these organs belonged I was unable to tell with certainty, although my mind hastened to form the most dreadful conclusion, and I resolved that the creature outside must be a lion—I had never seen a menagerie, but my father had an illustrated copy of Buffon into which I was allowed to dip on rare occasions—that had escaped from some wrecked ship, and had reached the shore in safety, but half frenzied with hunger. Evidently the brute had sniffed me out, and, disappointed of his prey, had attacked and killed the unhappy fellow who had so unsuspectingly advanced down the passage—probably poor Sam the ostler.

This theory was sufficiently distressing, for the famished monster must be regaling himself on a human being, and doubtless some other unfortunate would fall a victim to its fury before the presence of so formidable an intruder became known to the inmates of the 'Pad,' and its destruction accomplished.

Reflection also showed me that however bad for poor Sam, Frank Powerscourt was better off than if the brute had been the escaped madman for which I at first took it. A lion could not well open a door of solid brickwork which when shut showed no token of existence from the passage, whereas a cunning maniac might as likely as not stumble upon the secret spring either by accident or by the craft frequently manifested by people in that unhappy condition.

But the thought of the unnatural meal that was in progress within twenty yards of me, and of the terrible fate that might befall others unless timely warning were given, filled me with horror; and now that all immediate fear for my personal safety was at rest, I plucked up courage enough to see that my plain duty consisted in leaving the rack and searching every corner of the cavern minutely, in the hope that some hidden outlet existed by which I could

gain access to the inn, and prevent any of the inmates from wandering to the monster's lair. The only mode of entry known to me was blocked up by an enemy whose leaguer it was impossible to evade. Some other exit must be sought for, and having resolved on doing my best—and it was no light undertaking for a boy of my years to search the recesses of that dimly-illuminated cavern after the stress which had been laid upon his nerves—I, an old man, may say so now without any fear of my grandchildren accusing me of vanity, or suspecting me of blowing my own trumpet—I cast about in my mind as to the most likely spot in which to institute my search, for I felt that every moment was of supreme value. It might be that my father himself would come along the passage in quest of me, and fall into the power of the savage brute, so having selected a smaller cavern apparently filled with forage as the most likely spot, I was about to swing myself from the rack to the manger beneath, when a rustling from the very quarter that I intended to explore held me motionless in my place. Crouching thus, I saw, with a return of unspeakable terror, an object advance from the recess—a small, compact, shapeless object, whether human or animal I could not tell in the indistinct light—shaking

fragments of straw from its sides, whilst at the same moment the roar and entreating moan rose from beyond the barrier, and the rasping of claws on the bricks was resumed with redoubled violence.

Was I dreaming? Were my senses leaving me? or was this all some horrible nightmare from which I should awake, and by-and-by be able to laugh at?

I stealthily pinched my arm and noted the pain it caused. It was no bad dream but horrid truth, and meanwhile the nameless thing—the object—instead of shrinking from the foe without, was hastening towards the barrier!

Half dead with terror, I remained in the rack with hushed breath, but with straining eyes, watching in bewildered suspense for what would follow.





CHAPTER IV.

THE NONDESCRIPT.



HERE are many more comfortable positions to be found than that which the human frame is compelled to assume when crouched up motionless in a hay-rack. The body of a boy is supple, and can accommodate itself readily enough to any posture that the exigencies of the moment may demand ; but believe me when I tell you, that to be doubled up in a kind of gigantic swallow's nest protruding from the wall, and compelled to remain in one attitude, without stirring so much as a finger, is about as trying a situation as can easily be imagined. I have no reason to suppose that the wooden framework of which my refuge consisted was constructed of material any harder than its nature and services demanded, and yet every bar seemed to become suddenly endowed with a sharp edge, and these

edges were apparently trying their best to cut through my skin, and arrive at the bone beneath. The instinct to move, to make even a slight change of position, and thus for a few seconds to alleviate the pain and irksomeness, was intense ; but such indulgence could not be granted, since even to stir, in however trifling a degree, might attract the attention of the nameless thing and lead to my discovery, and other results too dreadful to contemplate.

I fancy I can see you sneer, Master Harry, when reading this, and hear you saying within yourself that you could bear inconvenience a hundredfold greater without wincing. Very good, my lad ; think so if it affords you any pleasure, but if the idea enters your mind to give the matter a trial, and you climb up into your pony's rack in the stable, believe me you will not want the stud-groom to stir your ribs up with a two-pronged fork, but will be ready enough to clear out on your own account, with some slight experience of the trial that your old grandfather underwent.

It was not as the small shapeless object was hastening towards the barrier that the misery of my cramped position became apparent, but afterwards. As the nondescript advanced the roaring moan of the animal outside seemed to

betray less suffering, whilst the scratching was renewed with such vigour that it plainly reached me in my distant retreat, and intense anxiety made me forgetful of all bodily discomforts for the time. I had disposed the hay around my body in such a fashion as to conceal it effectually from any casual observer, and through the wisp which covered my face I stared open-mouthed at the extraordinary figure which had now drawn close to the brickwork forming the secret entrance to the cave.

“What is the creature going to do now?” I thought. “Can it be a human being or an animal? and if the latter, of what description? for it evidently could not be the lion’s cub, since the king of beasts from his birth to his death uses all four legs for walking, whereas this unknown contented himself with two, moving along swiftly in an upright position, with his hairy paws dangling down by his side.

I must here remind you that the light by the aid of which all my hasty observations were made was very insufficient, consisting of a slush lamp—an iron pot filled with grease, and a rough cotton wick inserted—hung from the roof, with a flame that flickered fitfully at every movement of the air, and sent up a continuous column of thick foetid smoke, by which the ceiling beams in

its vicinity had been turned to the colour of charcoal. Such a rude contrivance was better adapted for dispelling darkness than for shedding light, and its fitful play no doubt added greatly to the weirdness of the scene I was about to witness; whilst its imperfections, by only partially revealing objects, left the imagination at liberty to fill in these half blanks according to the beholder's pleasure, and thus my heated fancy unquestionably created much that a better light would have shown to be non-existent and absurd.

But dim and wavering though the flame was, it appeared to me a thousandfold too bright as I saw the nondescript apply both fore-paws to the handle of the door, and lean his squat form against the barrier to force it open. As the obstacle yielded and turned slowly back on its hidden hinges, the noise issuing from the animal outside came to my ear in loud unbroken volume, and in an instant it struck me that the tones were no longer fierce and menacing, but rather eager and rejoicing, as though the savage brute had attained the object for which he sought, and that with this success his evil disposition had passed away.

But I had, as you may perhaps imagine, small time for conjecture, for before the door had opened half-a-dozen inches I saw a huge hairy

paw armed with terrific claws—I could understand the scratching on seeing these murderous talons!—thrust into the aperture, and in a moment the massive barrier swung quickly back, and there shuffled in with distended jaws, lolling tongue, and beady eyes a gigantic bear,—a travelling Italian had once passed through Old Shoreham with one of these animals, so I knew them by sight,—from whose waist still hung a fathom or so of chain, the links of which clanked grimly as the creature moved.

On the appearance of Bruin the nondescript had not sought safety in flight, or shown any intention of doing so, but had immediately flung his fore-paws round the bear's neck, and bending down, had exerted some unknown spell which brought the huge brute to a standstill, and caused it to rear up on its haunches and assume a sitting posture, where it remained with its great head wagging from side to side, its arms drooping down before the chest, its cunning little eyes twinkling and winking in the lamp-light, a succession of low moaning grunts, which were evidently indicative of satisfaction, proceeding from the throat, and its whole bearing that of extreme pleasure manifested in its most grotesque form.

Now followed a scene the like of which I firmly

believe was never before witnessed by a boy of twelve, and is never likely to be seen again, except at Christmas time, when they play the old fairy story of 'Beauty and the Beast,' and even then the Beast is only some poor fellow dressed in a bear's hide; whilst the principal performer on my stage was a *bonâ fide* Bruin,—a rare big one too!—and the scene was in sober earnest, for neither of the actors knew then that an unseen witness was following all their movements with mingled astonishment and fright.

Imagine my bewilderment when I saw the smaller animal bend forward, and placing his fore-paws on the ground, rear himself aloft in this strange fashion, his hind-legs locking themselves round the shaggy neck of Bruin, who wagged his great head solemnly over this extraordinary necklace, and let fall drops of slaver from his lolling tongue as he gave vent to little grunts that were doubtless intended to convey unbounded tenderness. For ten good minutes these mysterious playfellows continued to hug and caress each other; after which the smaller stood upright with his back towards me, and made gestures with his paw, whereupon the bear went through a variety of antics that would have made a cat laugh. He stood on his head; he danced, lifting his enormous feet briskly from

the ground, and bringing them down on the pavement with a dull thump of which I have since been reminded whenever I saw a thrasher attacking a whale; he rolled himself into a ball and trundled about, like a bale of brown fur, with such rapidity that it was impossible for the eye to distinguish his shape; he stretched out to the full extent of his great length, and lay in that position perfectly motionless, imitating death—as George has taught his terrier to do—whilst the little nondescript walked from end to end of his body, even tugging at the hairy ears to test his endurance; and finally the monster rolled over quietly on his side, whilst the smaller creature deliberately seated itself on his body, and nearly drew from me a cry of astonishment by slipping off the skin of its right fore-paw, and bringing to light the delicate white hand of a child, with which it searched its furry ribs and brought forth from some mysterious recess a large lump of sugar, on seeing which hungry Bruin gained his hind-quarters with such rapidity as to tumble his little companion over, and when the latter rose I saw that the hood concealing his face had fallen back, and there stood revealed to me a fair-haired, blue-eyed boy, perhaps a couple of years younger than myself.

What would have been my next step on

making this astounding discovery it is hard to say. The bars of the rack were eating into my flesh, and the cramp seemed to have taken up its abode in every joint ; and, since I had nothing to fear from the nondescript, I should most likely have made my presence known, but the sound of voices and footsteps hurrying along the passage became audible at this juncture, and saved me from further deliberation.

On hearing the noise both child and bear went swiftly into the inner cavern, from which the former had originally emerged, and I feel sure their retreat was turned into something very much like a flight by the unexpected howl which proceeded from my perch half-way up the wall ; for, hearing my friends outside, I had no intention of being overlooked and left to the tender mercies of a great brute of a bear, so proceeded to make my whereabouts known by shouting shrilly at the top of my lungs.

My howling lost nothing in intensity when I noticed that there was a momentary halt outside the barrier, but immediately afterwards the brickwork was swung aside, and my father's tall figure appeared in the aperture, crying out, " Frank, Frank, are you here ? "

The play I was giving to my bellows must have assured him at once that his only son was

not only in the cavern, but also sound in wind, if not in limb; but to discover my whereabouts was not so easy, for, as I told you before, I had stowed the hay about my hull in such a manner as to hide myself from view; and on my attempting to rise, I found my limbs powerless from cramp, so I was obliged to keep everything still except my tongue, which I let run like a cherry-clapper in a north-easter.

"Where can he be?" asked my father anxiously, whilst peering in every direction but the right one. "I hear his voice, but the place is so gloomy I can make out nothing."

"Let me take a squint," cried the deep voice of Captain Zebedee. How welcome they were, these friendly utterances! "I know the ropes of this place better than you, sir. Now then, young shiver-the-mizzen, sing out again and let me take your bearings."

Needless to say that I obeyed with ready alacrity, and in another moment my deliverers were staring up at the hay-rack, through the bars of which my pale face was peeping.

"Hop down out of that crow's nest, my young cock-o'-the-loft," cried the skipper with a cheery laugh, and holding out his brawny arms to receive me, whilst a sigh of relief broke from my father.

Most excellent advice, which I was perfectly

willing to follow, but neither legs nor arms would obey the will.

"I'm stiff and can't move," I cried; "but take care the bear does not rush out on you. He is in there with a boy dressed up like a beast," and I motioned towards the recess with my eyes, the only part of me beyond the tongue which seemed to move freely.

"All right, young step-and-stretch-'em,"—Captain Zeb I afterwards found had a faculty for composing appropriate and many-worded epithets on the spur of the moment,—“we'll see about them afterwards. The first thing to do now is to give your pipe-stem shanks a little more sea-room;” and thus speaking, the gallant skipper, who I observed had laid aside the blunderbuss, jumped into the manger with more agility than his bulky form seemed to promise, and standing on tiptoe was just able to get a grip of my collar with one hand, and of the slack of my small-clothes with the other, when, with a vigorous heave, he lifted me over the edge of the rack and handed me gently to my father, who, with outstretched arms, was standing below ready to receive me.

"Now, sir," he cried, jumping down after having shaken all the hay out on to the floor, "let him sprawl a bit there, and he'll soon recover the use

of his pins. I know what it is myself after a four hours' spell in the crow's nest of a whaler. Ten minutes will see him as lively as a sand eel ; and meanwhile, sir, would you take a look at that rascal Joe ? I'll have him brought in."

Zebedee's advice was too practical to be disregarded, and my father placed me softly on the heap of hay, after receiving an assurance from my lips that nothing worse than a fright had befallen me during his absence.

"But the bear is in there, and if it rushes at me I shall be unable to move," I continued.

"Don't be alarmed," replied my father, smiling. "It is only a tame creature, that would hurt no one unless provoked. It appears to have given Joe Wigglesworth a taste of its temper though," he continued in an undertone. "Here they come with the fellow ; now we shall soon see."





CHAPTER V.

A TRAITOR.

UNTHOUGH stiff in my limbs, and unable to move a yard to save my life, all my senses were wide enough awake ; and now that I was relieved from the danger that had appeared so imminent, and was within the reach of friendly glances, and the cheery tones of friendly voices, all the curiosity within me—and I was possessed of a very fair share of that commodity—awoke to life at once, and I had shrewdness enough to recognize that the only means by which I could witness the exciting events passing around me, and thoroughly clear up the mystery of the boy and the bear, was by remaining perfectly quiet, and not obtruding myself on the public attention by word or gesture. I was well aware of the deep affection with which my father regarded me, although his manner was somewhat reserved,

and he was not one to reveal his inmost feelings lightly, and I felt sure that if he once reflected how out of place a boy was in that gloomy cavern, I should be kindly but inexorably banished to the care of plump little Lucy Cheesman, whose ideas of juvenile happiness were bounded by a horizon of which bread and jam formed the principal ingredient. I admired her system thoroughly, and never showed any reluctance in submitting to her treatment without a murmur; but now—after such an adventure, and after braving such dangers—my soul recoiled from sweets and pastry, and I determined to let myself neither be seen, heard, nor thought of until the time for leaving the subterranean apartment arrived.

And at this point I must impress upon you lads that much of what I here record was not known to me at the time, but came to my knowledge later, though always from the principal persons concerned, whose testimony was unimpeachable. To jot down only what I saw with my own eyes, or heard with my own ears, and then to try back in the full tide of anecdote to explain each disjointed utterance or trivial occurrence, would pretty soon make a foul line of my narration, and lead to a rambling meaningless yarn as long as the maintop bowline.

You have insisted on my writing the story, and I do so willingly, but with the wisdom of sixty odd summers on my back, and the knowledge that after years brought to me of the events in question. Nevertheless I shall always stick as closely as possible to what *did* happen in my presence; but if you ever find me putting down in the present what could only have become known to me in the future, don't cant your foolish young snouts in the air, like a pig in a hurricane, under the delightful impression that your old grandad has got out of soundings, but rest assured that he knows the chart of his own life's voyage better than any one else, and that whatever he may set down out of place is so set down of direct will and intention.

I heard you all three giggling the other evening over some mistake you had hit upon in ——'s nautical phraseology. When you had gone to roost I turned the book up and found the error. It was a grave one, and only showed me the truth of the old homely saying, 'Cobbler, stick to your last.' The writer didn't know the flying jibboom from the taffrail, and yet he was not ashamed to involve himself in minute descriptions of intricate nautical manoeuvres. I am a seaman, but I should think twice before venturing to describe life in the mines, or in a

manufacturing district, for I know nothing whatever about either, and don't want to. Your writer of sea tales, however, thinks that when he has acquired a few technical phrases (which he invariably misapplies) he is master of a craft so difficult that a lifetime passed in its pursuit still leaves much to be learnt. If you want to hear about the sea you must go to seamen for instruction and not to landmen. The latter mean well, and they amuse those who know no better, but I think they would seek another field for their next stroke of genius if they could once hear their favourite 'Jack Tar-isms' torn to shreds in the gun-room of a line-of-battle ship. So take my advice, and stick to Marryat, Hannay, and Chamier, when you won't go far wrong.

Mute as a fish then I sat upon my heap of hay—not, I must confess, without an occasional nervous glance in the direction of the recess which held Bruin—as four men entered carrying a fifth in their arms, from the latter of whom proceeded many groans mingled with more objectionable expletives, at all of which I thought the poor fellow's bearers laughed in rather an unfeeling manner. With measured tramp they advanced to the middle of the cavern and laid the sufferer down immediately beneath the slush lamp, the rays of which flickering upon his pale

face revealed the features of the man who had been so rude to me in the common tap-room, and who had met with such exemplary punishment from the powerful hands of Skipper Zebedee.

“Now, Joe Crack-your-rib,” cried that gentleman, when the wounded man was extended on the ground, “bring your mauled carcase to an anchor whilst Mr. Powerscourt overhauls it to see what spars are sprung. If you hadn’t been skulking about where you had no business, or if you had been less clumsy with your pistol earlier in the evening, nothing would have happened, and all these kegs and gear”—pointing round to the bales—“would be safely distributed over the Weald by now,” continued the skipper in a bass grumble, which he probably intended to be inaudible, but which echoed among the rafters of the cavern like muttering thunder.

Meanwhile my father had knelt down beside the prostrate man, and was passing his hands gently over his sides, which had been laid bare, and which seemed to my inexperienced eye to be one huge bruise, whilst from more than one place the blood was slowly trickling. The patient winced under the examination and would have sworn—every one was more or less addicted to that foolish and wicked habit in those days—had my father not firmly declared that at the first

oath he would leave the fellow to shift for himself, in which determination he was backed up by Captain Zebedee, who, rough though he was, swore very little for one in his peculiar line of life, preferring—and very sensibly, I thought—the composite jargon of his own particular coinage to senseless profanity.

“Now turn him over on his back,” said my father. “Nothing worse than a couple of ribs broken and a plentiful supply of bruises as far as I can see at present. Over with him gently—Why, what is the matter?”

This latter query was called forth by the wounded man twisting himself suddenly round and making a snatch at a piece of paper which had fallen from his pocket and had been promptly picked up by the man with the long beard and winking eye, whose face I had fancied seemed somehow familiar to me.

“What’s your hurry?” cried the latter; “you know it’s safe enough with me, for I can’t read naught except to spell out master’s name on the tail of a cart.”

“Give it back—it’s mine—return it at once,” almost shrieked the patient, whilst the stolid Sussex clown held the paper just out of his reach.

“Shan’t then, Joe,” drawled the bearded fellow

with exasperating slowness. "Take a look at it, captain, for I fancy the rumpus the chap makes over it means something," and he extended his hand with the letter to Zebedee, who had just rejoined the group from the examination of some of the bales.

"It is mine—how dare you?" yelled the fellow, making a desperate dash to intercept the paper, but succeeding only in sending the long beard of his tormentor flying, whereupon the smooth face of Will Strong, head-waggoner to Squire Standish of Bramber, stood revealed to the company, who burst into a roar of laughter at the sudden transformation, for to them this was only a piece of rough horse-play such as they delighted in, and they ascribed Joe's reluctance to the letter being seen to no cause deeper than some love affair which he was anxious to conceal, and they were just as desirous to know.

When Wrigglesworth saw the paper in the hands of Captain Zebedee he gave utterance to one horrible imprecation, then made a determined effort to rise, and so far succeeded as to gain his feet, and to make a pace or two forward, when the deep voice of the skipper rang through the vault, crying, "Treachery—seize him!" and in a moment half-a-dozen strong arms were laid heavily upon the wretched man, who sank down

to the earth, overwhelmed by pain, mortification, and terror.

My father had gained his feet from the kneeling posture he was occupying when the incident began, and now stood with folded arms watching, a heavy frown on his brow, for he was one of those who held treachery, or cowardice, or any underhand meanness as a crime of the blackest dye. For myself, I remained as still as the prickling, tingling sensation of returning circulation would allow me, stretching my legs gradually to loosen the joints, and both listening and staring with ears and eyes, and with my attention divided between the group of men and the door of the inner cavern ; for at the sound of the skipper's thunderous voice the fair head of the mysterious boy had become visible, with wonder and astonishment written plainly on every feature, and I half feared his enormous companion would saunter out, for although I had implicit confidence in my father, still I could hardly regard Bruin as entirely harmless after the ghastly sight presented by Joe Wrigglesworth's flanks and back. From the furtive glances which I took at the boy I perceived that he was much astonished at seeing me, a lad of his own age, in the cavern ; and his large blue eyes wandered towards me in such a wistful

fashion that I truly believe that I should have joined him for the purpose of making acquaintance but for two very excellent reasons:—the first, that as yet my limbs were not sufficiently relaxed to admit of my moving; the second, that this boy, winning as he looked, had already within a few feet of him a chum of whose greeting I was by no means certain, and who might take any advances on my part in a hostile spirit.

Meanwhile Captain Zebedee was standing beneath the slush lamp, the flickering flame of which cast a strong light upon his rugged features and stern brow, as he painfully deciphered the letter, for reading a strange handwriting did not come easy to even the leader of a smuggling band in those days, the requirements of whose duty were amply fulfilled if he could wade through a bill of lading, write up his log-book, and work out his craft's position by dead reckoning. As he read the shadow on his face grew deeper, and the heavy brow more firmly knitted, whilst the men were grouped round him with expectant faces, some peering over his shoulder in the hope of thus reaching the truth sooner than their fellows, others gazing down on the prostrate traitor with eyes that boded little mercy for the culprit if his guilt was established.

At last Captain Zebedee seemed to have

mastered the contents of the document, and waving back the men, ordered Will Strong to summon all the remaining smugglers, who were still carousing in the tap-room unaware of anything unusual having taken place, and to desire Jack Cheesman's immediate attendance with them. Before Will could depart on his errand the unhappy prisoner on the floor raised his head, and turning up to the leader a face of ashy hue, begged for mercy in tones of piteous entreaty which I then thought should have drawn tears from a capstan-bar, but which had apparently no softening effect whatever on either the skipper or his men.

"Too late now, Joe Wrigglesworth," he returned in his deep stern tones; "you should have thought of this before you sought to betray those who have often shared their last biscuit with you, and who would sooner have scuttled the old hooker with their own hands, and put a match to the magazine beneath this cavern, than have proved false to a brother shipmate—for *gold!*"

They were terrible words, but there was a ring of scorn in the speaker's voice when he touched on the baseness which actuated the criminal—the sordid thirst for lucre which had proved too strong for his fealty—which made the rough

desperado seem quite noble, and gave me the first distinct idea of all this treachery meant.

And now the remaining smugglers came hurrying in, some winking and blinking as though they were only half awake, others flushed and heated with the strength of their potations, and more than one lurching in his gait and showing that he had as much grog stowed away under hatches as was good for him. Many of the horsemen had allowed their beards to come loose, or to be pushed awry, and I now recognized familiar faces amongst this portion of the smuggling band, but the hair belonging to the fellows in seafaring garb was evidently their own, and they were complete strangers to me.

"Now, my jolly Free-traders, listen to me," shouted Captain Zebedee from the top of an upturned keg on which he had taken his stand. "But first let us be sure that there are no spies amongst us. Jack Cheesman, cast your eye along, for I will warrant him a smart rogue who escapes your glance. Pull the barrier firmly to, and you, Will Strong, keep watch over it with your drawn cutlass, and don't be squeamish about using it if necessary.

"Messmates, comrades, and brother Free-traders," he continued, when these directions had been obeyed, "for the ten years that we

have worked together there has never yet been found one amongst our number so cowardly and currish as to sell his brothers for money, like a false Judas. Many a good sailor has lost the number of his mess in that time, some by the lead or steel of the gaugers, others by mishap, whilst not a few have been whipped off by the pressgang to serve King George afloat, and to lend a hand in hunting the Johnny Crapauds from port to port. Nelson and many other navy officers know the value of a jolly Freetrader, and would sooner have him than half-a-dozen beach-combers, who are scarcely worth the grub they strike down into their holds. And why? Because our chaps know what discipline and obedience mean, and can tell a good seaman when they fall across one, which is more than your 'long-shore loafer can. Shame that there should be a traitor amongst messmates and brother sailors!"

By this time the new-comers had begun to see the real drift of affairs, and many menacing eyes were bent on the prostrate form of the criminal, who seemed to shrink together into a heap from shame and fear. One burly fellow half drew his cutlass, but the quick eye of Zebedee detected the movement, and his thundering voice once more rang out—

“Hands off, Sam Culpepper. Remember the articles drawn up and signed by all of us, in which it says that a traitor shall be tried by his own comrades, and the manner of his punishment left to the leader. I am your skipper, and I will take care of that part of the business; while your duty is to find out whether or not the prisoner is guilty of the charge brought against him. A very few words will let daylight into his rascality. We had made all arrangements for distributing the goods immediately after the landing, and the boats were to take them up the river to Bramber to-night, where the carts and horses are assembled in readiness. Now at eight o'clock there happens a curious thing. We had just settled our plans, and sent off a mounted man to warn the waggoners, when there comes the report of a pistol just outside the ‘Pad,’ followed by a yell from the Rooshian, who was mooring his bear to the rear of the house, for, as you know, horses won’t approach such animals readily, and we looked upon it as likely that circumstances might compel us to stable a few nags in this cavern whilst the cargo was being moved from it to the boats, and the smell of this furry chap would have made them restive.

“What happens next? Why, we find the shot comes from Joe Wigglesworth, who vows that

he was putting fresh priming in the pan of his pistol when the weapon goes off and shoots the poor Rooshian. This causes us to send for Mr. Powerscourt here to see what is the matter with the furriner, whose money we had taken, and whom we were bound to see safe, together with the boy and beast, and although the wound turns out to be trifling, still it delays us for an hour or so, and very lucky it does to my way of thinking.

"Now mark me, topmates, and see how a rogue always defeats his own ends. This blustering knave, this bundle of shivering cowardice," pointing to the culprit, "tries to put on bounce when Mr. Powerscourt comes into the tap-room, and I am obliged to put a stopper on his insolence and give him a rough-and-tumble, after which he sneaks out of the room instead of taking his punishment like a man, and tries to get into the cavern here, for what purpose is best known to himself—perhaps to damage the lock so as to give his gauger friends more ready admittance.

"But what has happened in the mean time? Why, the bear, seeing the Rooshian fall, and carried away to the inn, parts his chain and follows up the drops of blood, but finding the door closed he breaks in somewhere and makes

for the entrance of the cavern, where the little master is stowed away.”—How I listened here, for it explained in the simplest way all that had been hitherto unaccountable!—“Here the animal remains for some one to let him in, when along comes this sneaking rascal—bent on some mischief, I’ll be bound—and falls into the creature’s arms, when old furry-coat gives him a hug which breaks half his ribs and squeezes all the breath out of his body, and it’s a thousand pities that he didn’t save us further trouble by gripping a trifle harder.

“Then we bring the fellow in here to have his wounds looked to, and what do we find in his pocket? This paper; and what does it contain? Just listen.

“‘If the run is for to-night, fire a pistol as if by accident at eight o’clock, and I will muster the men at once under Chanctonbury Ring to cut the waggons off. They are too numerous to be attacked at Bramber by the small force at my command. ‘C. L.’

“Now can you guess who ‘C. L.’ is? Well, it stands for Clawsby Latimer, the head of the Preventive Service at Worthing, and if it hadn’t been for the bear we should have walked into as foul a trap as ever was laid. That is the

case, messmates, as clearly as I can put it; and now lift the rascal on his legs, and see what answer he can give to the charge."

A dozen strong arms plucked the quivering wretch into an upright position, but he sank immediately to his knees, clasping his hands together, and begging for mercy in an abject manner that I should have thought a great grown man incapable of.

"Spare me—only spare my life!" he whimpered. "Captain Zebedee—Mr. Powerscourt—I have been a good man and true until temptation came—intercede for me with these kind friends."

My father drew back in disgust, for the fellow had shuffled forward on both knees and attempted to lay a hand upon his arm, whilst Captain Zebedee sprung down from his keg and jerked the culprit rudely back, for the term 'kind friends,' addressed to men whom the rascal had intended to sell like so many herrings, roused the honest skipper's deepest disgust.

"What say you, my lads—does he deserve any mercy?" asked the leader in his sternest voice.

"None!" "Death!" "Walk the plank!" was the response from thirty throats.

"Then clear the cavern, and leave him to me.

You will remain, please, Mr. Powerscourt and Jack Cheesman, whilst Will Strong can stand on guard at the door. I will join you in half-an-hour, my lads," he continued, as the men filed off towards the entrance. "There won't be any moonlight work done to-night, I'm thinking."





CHAPTER VI.

JOE DISPOSED OF.

“**N**OW, sir,” asked Captain Zebedee of my father as soon as the smugglers had retired—“now, sir, what am I to do with this double-dyed traitor? By all the laws of our association I am bound to take his life, and thus put an everlasting stopper on his treacherous tongue; but although the picked-up-along-shore rogue deserves no mercy at my hands, I am a sailor and not a hangman, besides feeling pretty confident that such chaps will always come to a bad end without my help. What say you, Jack Cheesman?—for this fellow’s blabbing would have turned you and Lucy adrift, homeless and starving.”

It was curious to observe how the culprit’s eyes shone with a hope which he was unable to disguise, although he cast an extra whine into

his voice as he besought the landlord of the 'Pad' to use his influence with the skipper to save him.

"You are right, captain," said honest Jack ; "quite right not to dirty your hands with such a pitiful cur ; better let the bear finish him off, I think,"—he gave a sly wink which was unseen by the prisoner as he suggested this blood-thirsty idea—"and then the Crow'ner's 'Quest will return a verdict of 'Sarve 'im right.'"

"An excellent notion, Jack. Let's clear out, and lock him in here with Rurick. The beast won't attack him until he is hard pressed with hunger, and during that time Joe can try and tame him as completely as the Rooshian has done."

"I think Rurick—if under that name you mean the bear—has given the man a pretty fair share of punishment already," broke in my father, who saw the agony of suspense written on the guilty wretch's countenance during this grim badinage. "Take him over to Holland next time your lugger goes there, Zebedee, and let him clearly understand that if he ever shows his face again in England he will be made away with without mercy."

"I will never return," moaned the prisoner, "never, if you only spare my life this time. I will

live on board the lugger, and do all the dirty work ; I'll—"

"Hark ye, Joe Wigglesworth," here thundered Captain Zeb, with disgust visible on every line of his weather-beaten face, "if you ever set foot aboard the tight lugger *Fly-by-night*, Commander Zebedee Holgale, it will only be as a prisoner, of whose company we shall all feel grateful to be rid. In the eyes of the law we may be offenders, but if we cheat the revenue we are honest men in other respects, and not the poorest chap in the Free-trade would dirty his fingers by laying them in your traitorous palm. You live on board my lugger?—you?" continued the skipper, waxing furious at the idea, and giving vent to his own peculiar phraseology now that judicial moderation was no longer expected of him. "You think to find a stow-hole for your Judas carcase between the ribs of the *Fly-by-night*? Why, the little hooker would *feel* that there was a mean-spirited scoundrel on board her, and would chuck you overboard, though you were lashed to the windlass. You dare to say such a thing again and I'll leave you here for the bear to finish—a left-handed, lopsided, crossjack-eyed rascal. Where was such scum as you dragged up, I'd like to know?—not in honest Sussex, or Kent either, I'll be

sworn. And now, whilst I think of it, tell us what brought you to the cavern when the bear fell foul of you? Out with it, and don't invent lies if you hope for mercy."

"I was going—I came—to remove the train communicating with the magazine," faltered the man.

"And so prevent our robbing the informer of any plunder by blowing the crib up, eh?" continued Zeb, who saw through the fellow's design at a glance. "Well, upon my word, Joe Wrigglesworth, your head is screwed on the right way, and with common honesty you would have made quite a name in the Free-trade. It seems a pity that so much talent should go adrift, but you will have to exercise it in future amongst the Mynheers, for the air of the south coast will be too keen for your constitution for the next ten years at all events. What are we to do with him until I run over to the Hague, Jack? It can hardly be expected that you will keep such a fellow in the 'Pad.'"

"No," replied the landlord; "and it would not be well for his neck if the men knew that he was here; but there is nothing to prevent his remaining in the recess there, when Mr. Powerscourt would perhaps be kind enough to look in from time to time, and see how his ribs were

getting on. Besides, captain," added Jack, with a shrewd twinkle in his eye, "don't you see that Joe can still continue his correspondence with Clawsby Latimer from here, and let him know when the cargo is going to be run? You won't mind sending the gauger on a fool's errand to make up for the mischief you have done, eh, Joe?"

"I will do anything—everything," moaned the fellow. "But I am in pain and weary; let me rest awhile."

"Double traitor and rascal!" cried Zeb with scorn. "He would sell his father for a guinea, a pitiful skulker, whose friends won't own him, clothes won't fit him, legs won't carry him, arms won't serve him! Here, little master," he added, his contemptuous tone changing at once to a rough cheeriness that was not without respect, "come out of that stow-hole with your friend Rurick; and you," addressing Joe, "had better haul off among the kegs until the bear has passed, or he may feel inclined to give you another grip, seeing that the creature is as sensible as any human being, and might be less forgiving than us, particularly as you shot his master."

Throughout the whole of the scene with the traitor Wigglesworth, whenever my eyes found

time to wander in the direction of the inner cavern, they rested upon the fair head of the mysterious boy, and more than once the clanking of a chain had told that my former bugbear, Bruin, was near at hand although out of sight. At the hail of Captain Zebedee the little fellow now stepped lightly forward, and with a grace which even his grotesque disguise was insufficient to conceal, made a courteous bow to my father,—a gesture so respectful and at the same time so full of dignity, let me tell you, lads, that in a long lifetime your old grandad has never met its equal,—and then, whilst murmuring something in French, held forth his delicate white hand, which my father grasped with the same stately courtesy that it pleased the little mannikin to assume.

After this first ceremonious greeting, which had in it nothing absurd, as from the rig of one of the actors might pardonably be supposed, the little chap laid aside his dignity, and questioned his new friend eagerly, eventually again thrusting his fingers into my father's palm, and suffering them to remain there, whilst his whole countenance betrayed relief, and tears of gratitude dimmed the brightness of his deep blue eyes.

My stiffness was now completely gone, and having gained my feet, I was standing looking

on with that shy awkwardness that distinguishes English lads from all others, when my father motioned me forward, saying, "Frank, here is a poor little waif who must be your playfellow until we see what can be done for him. Shake hands, and then lead him in to Lucy Cheesman, who will take care of you both until I am ready to go home."

At this announcement I hung my head shyly, but at a few words from my father the little chap stepped gravely forward, and before I well knew what he was about had kissed me lightly on the forehead, and taken my half-reluctant hand in his.

"There, that is capital," cried my father, who had watched the whole scene with an amused smile. "Now that the ice is broken you will soon get on. Be off at once to Lucy; she will take care of you." And this I am bound to say Mrs. Cheesman did, for after making us eat a large bowl of bread and milk each, she carried us off to a snug little room with a couple of beds, in one of which I soon lost all consciousness of the doings of that eventful day in the deep sleep of bodily and mental fatigue.

Now I fancy hearing you boys say to yourselves, "Here is grandad, who has promised to tell us the story of his early adventures, and he

has taken up half-a-dozen chapters with the events of a single night. At this rate his yarn will be as long as a ropewalk."

Have no fear on that score, for if one evening only has been described as yet, the doings of the next eighteen months will occupy only as many lines, and then we shall come to the sea life of which you are so anxious to hear; but first of all I must say a few words about my father, and then explain how the little fellow with the golden locks, whom I have called the 'nondescript,' came to be found in company with a bear at the 'Sussex Pad,' for this mysterious urchin will hold a very prominent position in the forthcoming narrative, and perhaps I shall heighten your curiosity by saying, that when we go to Paris this year you shall see him, for he was, and ever will be, my dearest friend. In holding out this hope I do not think I take away from any interest that this little book may possess, but if you object to what I consider necessary explanation, you had better skip the following chapter, and read the narrative in whatever light seems best to yourselves.



CHAPTER VII.

THE POWERSCOURT FAMILY.

MY father—your great-grandfather—was a younger son of that John Powerscourt whose picture hangs in the dining-room, and represents him swathed in a huge cloak trimmed with rich fur, for your ancestor was a great Russian merchant, who had been elected as their chief by the foreign traders of St. Petersburg, at whose request this picture was painted, in the robe of office worn by him as president of their association. I may say at once that I never saw my grandfather, who died abroad before I visited the Continent, but I know him to have been a man of great strength of will, combined with much shrewdness and penetration in business matters, whereby he amassed a large fortune, and was held in high esteem by the Imperial

family, to whom the Englishman's disinterested advice was often most useful.

John Powerscourt had two sons and one daughter.

Frank, the eldest, after whom I was named, followed his father's business, but died in early manhood whilst still unmarried; the old merchant, in fact, outliving him some four or five years.

George, my father, who was eighteen months younger than his brother Frank, had early shown an insuperable dislike to commerce, and an equal attachment to science, a crookedness of disposition that brought down upon his luckless head the contempt and wrath of old John, who regarded a successful merchant as far superior to all the chemists, astronomers, and mathematicians in Europe. However, he grumblingly acceded to my father's wishes, and sent him to a good school in England, from which, in due course, he went to Oxford, where he took a high degree. Natural science had always possessed a special attraction for him, and he studied medicine and surgery eagerly, not with the intention of practising either of these noble arts, but more with a view to enlarge his mind, since the share of wealth which would descend to him, even as only a second son, would put

him in a position of complete ease, if not of opulence, and entirely obviated any necessity for his pursuing a profession as a means of subsistence. But my father did not confine himself to his studies so entirely but that he found time to fall in love with pretty Kate Maldon, the only daughter of an Oxfordshire clergyman, whom in due course he married, without, as it appears, thinking of asking the permission of his father, or even of communicating his intentions to him.

The proud and fiery old man was deeply indignant at what he considered unfilial conduct, and a breach of the thorough confidence which ought to exist betwixt father and son. He was also soured and harassed at the same time by his only daughter,—to whom we shall come presently,—and I think my Uncle Frank's persistent refusal to marry, when the wealth and influence of the family could have been considerably augmented by a judicious alliance, added to his anger; in any case, he took my father's hasty step deeply to heart, stigmatizing it as gross disobedience, and forbade the young man ever again to enter his presence unless specially invited to do so. My mother—the poor young wife, who soon found out what a breach love for her had opened in her husband's family—

was included in this ban, and although she took the long and weary journey to St. Petersburg in hopes of seeing the old man, and effecting a reconciliation between him and George, yet the effort was made in vain, for John Powerscourt refused to see her, and the poor girl returned to England not only unsuccessful, but with the germs of the fell ravager, consumption, which was destined to leave me early a motherless babe.

In justice to my grandfather, I must say that he seems to have been sorely tried within his domestic circle at that time, although, by one of those extraordinary caprices that Dame Fortune often exhibits, everything that he touched out of doors — every speculation into which he entered, however absurd and improbable — turned to gold. Notwithstanding his determination not to see my father again, John Powerscourt had too much pride of family and too much real justice in his character to allow his second son to suffer from straitened means; and whilst interdicting all intercourse, he actually increased his allowance to an amount commensurate with his altered condition, so that my poor mother, during her short two years of wedded life, had every comfort and attention that money and the most devoted of husbands could lavish on her.

Alas! it was in vain, and my father's medical skill enabled him to see that the precious flower which he had plucked, and had hoped to wear in his breast for life, was fast fading away, and would soon be a thing of the past. Within six months of my birth the sun of his earthly life was quenched for ever, and the poor girl sank to rest in his arms, faintly upbraiding herself to the last with having been the unwitting cause of the breach between her husband and his father.

From the time of his leaving Oxford to my mother's death my father had lived in London, but now an intense longing for solitude took possession of him—a yearning for some sequestered spot where he could mourn over her whom he had lost, where in his favourite studies he might gain temporary oblivion, and perhaps chiefly where the mildness of the climate would guarantee the infant from contracting that fell disease which had proved so fatal to the mother. With this intent he settled in Old Shoreham, and had there led a tranquil and uneventful life until the evening which I have just described, engrossed in his scientific researches and in the less pleasant occupation of my education—I say 'less pleasant,' because, although my father and I were attached as parent and child rarely

are, still to teach a youngster the very elements of classical lore must have been trying to a student so advanced in knowledge as he was. But if this was so he never showed it, and his patience was unvarying, although my ignorance and inattention must have tested it pretty frequently. Professionally he never practised, indeed he laid no claim to the title of a medical man, but nothing can be kept long hidden in a gossiping little village like Old Shoreham, and his skill soon became known, though it was only on rare occasions that he would exercise it, and then never but in cases of emergency, or when the very poorest of our neighbours were in bodily need. For such services he would never receive any remuneration; and although he was a cause of wonder to the simple people, he was perhaps the best loved man on the Sussèx coast, despite his efforts to avoid popularity. The cottage we lived in was small, but at the rear my father had built a laboratory and study, in which were stored the costly instruments that constituted his chief pleasure, as well as his chief source of expense. Living very frugally, with only one servant indoors, and a man to look after the horses, my father could hardly have spent one-third of his income whilst at Shoreham, indeed I know

that he laid by a very considerable sum, since his tastes never led him into extravagance, except in the purchase of scientific instruments, books, and horses. Of the latter he had the two best hunters in that part, and a pony for me as soon as I was old enough to mount one, besides a sturdy cob for the gig, and he never missed a meet when it was within reasonable distance. We had also a couple of boats—a large-sized wherry with tanned sails, and a skiff for the river.

Although never avoiding his fellow-men, my father showed but little inclination to mingle freely with the families in the neighbourhood, and I think he was regarded by them somewhat in the light of a mystery, although no one was more cordially welcomed at the cover-side, or more popular in spite of the habitual reserve which was natural to him. Altogether I think you will own that I was not very badly off, indeed that I had everything to render a lad happy and contented—a kind father, a good pony, a boat, and the glorious sea close at hand, whilst the low-lying country between the Downs and the beach was a very paradise for a boy, and after lessons were over I was always at liberty to ride, boat, or wander abroad as suited my own inclination.

I have now said all that is necessary concern-

ing my father. There were times at which, child as I was, I noticed that fits of depression would overcome him, when he would dismiss me early from my lessons and retire to the solitude of his laboratory; and as years passed I came to know that one of these seasons was on the anniversary of my mother's death, and the other when old Giles, the wooden-legged postman, had left a letter at the cottage with a foreign post-mark; but of the contents of such letters I knew nothing, and my father soon recovered his wonted serenity.

I now pass on to another member of the family of whom I have made but slight mention as yet—my Aunt Olga, so named, I believe, after a Russian archduchess, who graciously held her as an infant at the baptismal font.

My Aunt Olga I never saw, but I have a miniature of her painted on ivory—the new-fangled art of photography was unknown in those days—which represents a very beautiful young girl of sixteen summers, with deep blue eyes and long golden tresses—a sweet face to gaze on, but one from which you always turned away with a feeling of inexplicable sadness. I am no great physiognomist myself, beyond being able to tell in a couple of glances whether a man looks honest or not, so I am unable to

name the precise feature which imparted this appearance; but there it lay, and some better face-readers than myself have since told me that the mournfulness was to be found in the clear unfathomable depths of the violet eyes, and in the corners of the well-moulded mouth. A gentle sorrowful countenance, in very truth, and my poor aunt's after career fully justified the dark forebodings that nature had imprinted on her features.

As she was the youngest of the three children, so was she the nearest to the heart of old John Powerscourt, although her birth made him a widower. Perhaps it was the very loneliness of the motherless little babe with the great blue yearning eyes, and the knowledge of all which the fragile little creature had cost him, which made her so precious to the bereaved man, and caused him to set higher store on Olga than on her brothers, and led him insensibly to spoil her, and grant her her own way in everything. She was exacting and capricious even as a child, and with early womanhood these failings became more distinctly developed, but neither served in any degree to alienate the affection of her doting father, who seemed as malleable in her hands as he was hard and obdurate in his conduct towards others.

Though living amongst foreigners, and deriving his fortune from them, old Powerscourt was a regular John Bull in his dislike for everything un-English ; and when he perceived that his little Olga was springing up into a lovely girl, remarkable even in a court where beauty was a passport to wealth and power, and observed the attention which she had already begun to attract, a sudden fear seized him lest his darling should be captivated by one of those brilliant young men glittering in their showy uniforms, and he determined to send her to England, where my father already was, heedless of the wound this separation would inflict on his own heart. But unfortunately the resolve was frustrated, and through the medium of the girl's god-mother, the archduchess, who had taken a fancy for the beautiful child, and insisted on her presence on all State occasions. It was in vain that John Powerscourt sought this princess, and begged her to release the girl for a season ; she was obdurate, with all the haughty pride of one who had never known any law but her own will, and she flatly refused to part with her god-daughter, whose future she announced her determination of providing for, and gave the girl's father clearly to understand that he must move no more in the

matter if he wished to preserve her good-will and favour.

Court influence can do a good deal even here in good old England, as certain naval appointments frequently show ; think then how important was the breath of royal favour in an empire where the monarch's slightest word was law, and who could make or unmake a man by a nod or the wave of a hand. John Powerscourt was obliged to obey the imperious lady, who meant the very best by the child in issuing this arbitrary decree, and contented himself with exacting a promise from his daughter that she would never permit the addresses of a foreigner without his consent ; and the girl made no scruple in pledging herself, for up to now she was heart-whole, and had never known one pang of the sweet passion love, which is so dear to all women.

This was at the time that my father was at Oxford, and before he had met the woman who was destined to alter the entire current of his life, and I feel confident that the events I am about to relate had much to do with the deep aversion with which, later on, John Powerscourt regarded his son George's marriage.

Immersed in his business transactions, and only seeing his beloved Olga on such rare occasions as her capricious and exacting mistress

could spare her, the old merchant was quite unaware of what was perfectly apparent to every one else in society, that the young English girl had won the heart of Prince Loriskoff, the Emperor's favourite aide-de-camp, and the owner of vast estates and mines in the Ural. And apparently the young Russian had found equal grace with the lady, for one morning Olga appeared before her father, and with little circumlocution, for she was humoured to the top of her bent, and accustomed to have her own way in everything, asked for the withdrawal of the pledge that she had given, announcing at the same time that Prince Loriskoff had asked her to be his wife, and that she had readily consented.

For a moment the old man was quite taken aback, but when he came to himself it was not to yield, as he had always done on former occasions. On this subject the stubborn John Bull pride rose paramount; and from what I have since heard, I firmly believe that if the suitor had been the Czar in person, he would have sent that august prince about his business without a moment's hesitation. In face of tears, entreaties, and persuasions he was adamant, simply saying that he refused to render back the pledge given him, and that if Olga chose

to marry without his permission she could do so, but that in that event he, John Powerscourt, would wash his hands of her for ever, and would never look upon her face again, although the resolve should break his heart in twain.

I have often fancied that my aunt must have formed a wrong estimate of the old man's character. Hitherto she had found him yielding in every particular,—he had indeed gone out of his way to gratify her most senseless caprices,—but she entirely forgot that such whims as she had hitherto manifested were perfectly innocent, and ran counter to none of the prejudices that were a part of her father's nature. I think if her brother George had been within reach he would have given her good advice, and perhaps have induced the old man to modify his resolution; but she had no one to fly to for counsel, for Frank, her eldest brother, was a quiet-going fellow, who hated any fuss or disturbance that interfered with his whist, and cared for nothing but to be left in quiet and the enjoyment of life in his own selfish fashion. What advice the archduchess with her strong class prejudices may have given I am unable to say, but I fully believe that Aunt Olga thought that with time her father would soften and relent, as he had

ever done ; and, to make the story short, she disobeyed him, was privately married to Prince Loriskoff, and the young couple set off for the south of Russia, to pass the honeymoon at one of the numerous estates belonging to the bridegroom.

I should perhaps say that even the prejudiced Russian aristocracy, with their barbaric pride of birth, could find no fault in such an alliance on the score of inequality, for my aunt could boast of a longer and better pedigree than her husband ; and in a country where a word from the Emperor's lips can make a noble out of a serf there is not much room for objection on that plea.

With Olga Loriskoff's departure from St. Petersburg ended her history as far as John Powerscourt was concerned, for her name never again passed his lips. If his heart was broken, he hid it in more extensive speculations ; if at times he yearned for the golden-haired child who had been his darling, he concealed the weakness under a mask of iron stoicism beneath which no one could penetrate. Again and again she wrote to him, letters teeming with affection and imploring forgiveness,—I have seen and read them,—but they were docketed and put away unopened, not to see the light until the bundle

was found by my father years afterwards. When she returned to St. Petersburg with her husband the stern old man left the town, and positively disobeyed an order to appear before her from the archduchess, for which heinous offence he narrowly escaped arrest. More than once Olga tried to see him, but he refused to admit her inside his door; and any servant carrying a message from her paid the penalty of his fault by instant dismissal. She, the disobedient daughter, had a husband who adored her; and in time there came a little baby boy to lighten her grief, and to wean her thoughts from the parent whom she had angered. But who can fathom the silent sufferings of that stern old man, robbed for the second time of all he held dearest upon earth, and yet battling with the busy world with unabated vigour, whilst allowing none to see the grief which was slowly breaking the strings of his stubborn heart?

Olga Loriskoff wrote to my father—he was her favourite brother—and implored his good offices with her estranged parent; but, as I explained before, George Powerscourt was in no position to give help, but rather required a mediator on his own account; since by his marriage with Kate Maldon he also had alien-

ated his father, but in a less degree than had been wrought by the direct disobedience of his sister.

Such was the position of affairs until I was six years old, when letters reached my father at Old Shoreham, informing him of one of those sudden and terrible reverses of fortune which are almost peculiar to Oriental races. There had been a revolution at St. Petersburg, in which the Czar had been barbarously murdered, and a woman now reigned in his stead in the name of the new monarch. All suspected of sympathy with the unhappy victim were mercilessly hunted down by the new autocrat, and either put to death or condemned to degradation, the loss of estate and position, with the further horrible penalty of banishment to Siberia—that hideous waste within whose wintry fastnesses the miserable prisoners hail death as a relief.

The most prominent of these unhappy people was Prince Loriskoff—the gay, the handsome, the spoiled child of Fortune hitherto! Known for his attachment to the murdered monarch, the young man was torn without warning from the arms of his wife and condemned to this terrible fate; indeed, it was only by the merest accident that he escaped mutilation. With

hundreds of others he was marched in chains bound for that wilderness of horror, Siberia; and by his side, cheering the poor broken-hearted fellow with voice and example, there plodded along through the beaten snow a young and fragile woman, who bore in her arms a child of four years old, and whose pluck and uncomplaining endurance drew forth expressions of pity even from the brutal escort.

That woman was my Aunt Olga, and up to the day of the adventure at the 'Sussex Pad' which has been already recorded, no one had gained the faintest tidings of her existence or whereabouts. She had dropped out of life as completely as though the grave had closed over her form. Did she still live in the heart of that stern old man,—sterner than of yore since his eldest born, Frank's, death,—whose once tall form is now bent and feeble, though his eye flashes bright as ever when recalled to the present from its painful peerings into the past? Has she been wholly rooted out from that breast where she once held the foremost place?

God knows, and God alone, for the iron features give forth no sign that may be surely read as such, though they show unmistakably that the end is near at hand, and that ere long

John Powerscourt will be called to another world, where pride and passion are not—where each of us, my dear lads, must answer for his own acts, and where all of us may hope to find a haven of rest through the infinite mercy vouchsafed to sinners.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE EXILES.

I NOW pass on to places and scenes which, at the time in question, it was impossible that I could either have visited or seen, but which have been described to me so frequently, and with such minuteness, that now, in my old age, it often requires an effort of memory to separate what has only been transmitted to me by hearsay from such occurrences as were enacted in my presence ; for, as the sequel of this story will show you, I afterwards saw the places of which I am about to speak with my own eyes, and was familiar with two at least of the principal personages whom I now introduce to you.

It is mid-day, and the scene an opening in the limitless forest that clothes the eastern portion of Siberia—a forest more monotonous and cheerless even than the Australian bush, for the

majority of the trees are sombre conifers, their long sweeping branches weighed down by a mantle of glistening snow, and only to a sprinkling of delicate birch trees is the vista indebted for a trifling diversity of green to relieve the eye amongst the blacks, greys, and universal whites.

Pitched under the shelter of the heavy timber, which serves as some protection from the fierce northern blast, stands a small encampment or village, the habitations in which are of considerable size, conical in form, and consist of a framework of stout pine saplings driven into the ground, with their ends brought together at the top, whilst the entire fabric is covered with a double thickness of reindeer skins, and a third coat of the same material hides the framework inside ; for the Siberian frost is a pertinacious visitor, and will enter by the smallest crevice that is left open by the unwary settler.

From these circular huts smoke is issuing through the hole left at the top of each, which denotes that the encampment is inhabited ; but otherwise there are no signs of life beyond a score or so of reindeer, and a queer little creature about four feet high and nearly as many broad, leaning against the stem of a tree, who looks like an animal, but is in fact a Koriak boy clad

in his furs, who is keeping watch over the small drove of deer that are retained near the settlement for domestic use. Even this uncouth little bundle of skins remains motionless, except when he slips his hands out of the slit in the palm of the huge mittens to re-stuff and light his pipe; for he knows that unnecessary movement stirs the air and means additional cold.

Some twenty paces from the main body stands a single skin tent, of rather larger dimensions than its fellows, and with the snow swept carefully away before the door so as to make a rough kind of yard. There is no need to present letters of introduction in that howling waste, or to entertain the slightest fear that our visit will be regarded as an intrusion; let us therefore push the skin covering from before the opening which serves as a door, and enter this primitive dwelling.

On first stepping in out of the snow-dazzle the interior appears like night, the darkness broken only by the flickering embers which occupy the middle of the floor and dispense a cloud of stifling smoke, which makes a newcomer cough and choke. But after a few minutes the eye becomes accustomed to the obscurity, and we can make out that a portion of the tent is separated from the rest by a partition of skins,

and forms a distinct apartment, or bedroom, a luxury which will be found in none of its neighbours.

Seated on stools drawn close to the embers are two persons, whom we recognize to be a man and a woman, by the delicate features and the absence of hair on the face of one, whilst the other is bearded and mustachioed ; for without the index thus afforded us, it would be impossible to guess at the sex of the fur-muffled figures, so closely do they resemble each other in all but height. The woman holds between her knees a miniature of herself, a little bundle of furs, from whose head the projecting hood has fallen back, showing the fair skin and delicate features of a boy some six years of age. The mother has slipped her hand from her glove and toys with the child's golden curls, passing her wan, thin fingers lovingly through the sunny tresses, and a deep sigh breaks from her breast as she does so, a sigh which is echoed in almost a groan by the man ; but otherwise these silent figures exchange no word, both peering into the embers, and both apparently dumb beneath that load of sorrow which can find no relief in sympathy, and no consolation in tears.

Wonderingly the boy looks from the grief-laden features of his father to the quiet agony

depicted on his mother's face, and tears rise to his own bright eyes as he recognizes a distress which he is powerless to lessen ; but suddenly from the tents without there arises a clamorous barking of dogs, mingled with the shrill but joyous cries of the Koriak women, and the child wrests himself from the loving embrace that would fain detain him, and slipping his feet into a pair of snow-shoes rushes precipitately into the open, shouting aloud, "The hunters! the hunters are coming!" and forgetful of all else in the excitement of this great event.

The woman follows his active form with sad eyes, and then stretching forth her thin hand lays it lovingly on the man's shoulder, whilst breaking silence for the first time.

"Husband," she says, "take courage, for in a few minutes the worst will be known. And even if the tale be incomplete, I cannot think them barbarous enough to order you back to the mines, and thus separate us again. Courage, Paul, my beloved, for God has not abandoned us yet!"

"Oelgchen, my Oelgchen, our misery has been great, but never yet have we lost our faith in Him," replies the man, deeply moved, now that the crisis of their lives is so near at hand. "But unless He in His mercy has sent the prey

to the hunter's snares, and we can make up the proper tribute of skins, my doom is sealed. Gouroff gave me ample warning last year when the furs fell short, and he hates me for not craving indulgence at his hands. I have little hope, my angel, for if the hunters failed last year when the season was good, what are we to expect now when—"

But further conversation is cut short by the entry of little Paul, who rushes in frantic with excitement, and crying out, "Father—mother—Kadoushki has been nearly torn to pieces by a bear. They have him on a sledge, and Irmac—kind Irmac!—has saved one of the beast's cubs, and I am to have it for a playfellow, if you will allow it. May I, father?—say, mother, may I?"

Before the parents can reply the skin door is thrown back, and a tall figure, looking almost gigantic in the thick envelope of furs, enters, saying in a gruff but not wholly unpleasant voice, "Peace, little father; and to thee, little mother, peace also!"

For one moment the man thus addressed stands pale and irresolute, his lips moving silently as though in prayer; then with sudden resolution he steps forward, and in accents that sound hollow from the intense excitement they

betray, he whispers, "Speak, Irmac—in mercy speak. Is the tale made up, or must I part from her—from him?" and he points to the boy, who is beaming with excitement.

On first entering, the giant has stood gazing into the darkness blankly, for he sees nothing, but by the time the agonized owner of the tent has finished speaking, the hunter's eyes have become accustomed to the obscurity, and disregarding the man, he turns towards the woman, who sits gazing into his face with anxiety, and without a word he falls down at her feet and lays across her knees the almost priceless skin of a large blue fox.

This huge fellow has meant to restrain his feelings before the people he loves best on earth, and to ape a stoicism he has often admired in others, but has never succeeded in acquiring himself; but at sight of the light in his mistress' eyes, and on hearing the gentle but heartfelt 'Thank God' which breaks from her lips, the reserve he has intended to display is broken through by the exuberance of the joy which fills him, and he commences talking with a rapidity and a violence of gesticulation that the listeners could hardly comprehend even were they attentive. But as it is, the man has approached his wife, and his arm has stolen

round her waist, whilst she, with her soft eyes filled with tears of gratitude, is gazing up into his face, and in the mutual love that each reads written on the other's countenance, the extravagant actions and words of poor Irmac are wholly disregarded.

If the giant notices this it in no wise incommodates him, and he rattles on, to the intense delight of little Paul, until his audience are ready to listen, when he ceases the wild Cossack war-song with which he is cheering his heart, and gladly recapitulates all that has escaped his hearers.

"Never was such a season," he cries; "and the furs collected are sufficient to pay the tribute for two years, besides a good margin for profit after the expenses of the expedition have been defrayed. Seven blue foxes! Why, such luck is unheard of. Kadoushki has got a bit scratched, but it was his own fault for not putting his spear into the bear's heart. Let the little father and mother both be happy, for they are safe against separation for some time to come. And now I must see to Kadoushki, for unless the stupid fellow is patched up the Koriaks would be afraid, and shirk their duty at the next hunt."

With this Irmac withdraws, leaving the husband

and wife to themselves, but accompanied by little Paul, who in his snow-shoes shuffles along at the big hunter's side like a ten-gun pelter under the lee of a three-decker.

Who this great kind-hearted fellow was, what country claimed him, and where his kith and kin resided, no one could tell, himself least of all. His earliest recollections were as a child amongst the Kirghiz Turcomans, from which state of slavery he was rescued by some Cossacks, with whom he served several years as a trooper. But even such slender discipline as was to be found in the ranks of these wild horsemen proved unpalatable to Irmac, who left his rescuers abruptly and drifted into Siberia, where he had adopted the calling of a fur-hunter, and from his gigantic stature had been looked upon with awe and terror by the superstitious natives, one tribe of whom begged him to reside permanently with them as their chief and 'shaman,' or wizard.

This the wanderer was perfectly willing to do, and his tribe soon regarded him with unquestioning confidence, for not only were their hunting expeditions most successful under his guidance, but, in addition to being the best shot, trapper, and fisherman in the wilderness, he beat the real shamans hollow at their own

game, having at command a thousand monkey-tricks, picked up no one knows where, by the exercise of which he gained an ascendancy over these semi-savages that had never before been wielded by any white man.

The natives of Siberia are compelled by the Russian Government to pay a yearly tribute of furs, and in the more inaccessible parts of the country it is not unusual to depute the collection of this to some political prisoner whose conduct has shown him deserving of such a favour. It is a most terrible mode of existence for a man of culture, meaning complete banishment from those of his own language and religion, a wandering life whithersoever the tribe to whom he is attached think fit to move, and the endurance of privations that you lads can hardly realize ; but, notwithstanding, it is a post eagerly sought for by the unhappy exiles, for whom it means comparative freedom, together with relief from the brutality of cruel jailors and rapacious officials. As long as the tale of furs exacted is forthcoming when the Government collector visits the tribe, well and good ; but if the receipts fall short, the blame is laid on the unhappy collector, and if there prove a deficit for two years in succession, the defaulter is sent back to the mines,

and some other convict selected to take his place.

After a couple of years' labour at Tobolsk, Number 458—a convict has no name in Siberia, his identity being merged in the registered number assigned to him—obtained the post of collector amongst the Koriak tribe presided over by Irmac. The exile had with him his young wife and a little boy, all three of whom were readily received into the good graces of the giant, who reigned supreme amongst his people ; and it so happened that this kindness was more than repaid, for on two occasions—once whilst hunting, and again whilst crossing a swollen river—Number 458 saved the chief's life. Moreover, there was no reason to doubt that Irmac, stout of body and heart as he was, would have died when stricken by fever, had it not been for the nursing of Oelgchen, the convict's wife ; and whatever were the adventurer's faults, want of gratitude was not one of them, and he repaid the services thus rendered to him with an affection that was almost grotesque.

Seeing how trustworthy and honest the fellow was, Number 458 took him into his confidence, declaring the causes which had led to his present unhappy position, and probably enlarging on his hopes for the future. However that may

be, Irmac now became a very slave to the tribute-collector and his family. The man he watched and obeyed with the ready alacrity of love, mingled with deep respect, whilst for the wife and child he showed a perfect veneration, in return for which little Paul, as was to be expected, became a thorough tyrant over the giant, bullying and teasing him no less to his own satisfaction than to that of the victim. When in camp the Cossack—if such he was—and the child were inseparable, and the kindly fellow's deepest delight was to be able to bring a smile to Oelgchen's sad face by the exhibition of some new trick which he had taught her boy.

The successful return of the hunters was like a new lease of life to the exiles, and the happiness of little Paul was rendered complete by permission to keep the bear cub, whose dam had injured Kadoushki. Under Irmac's instruction the little creature learned to perform certain tricks which enhanced the Cossack's reputation as a wizard, and as it grew up the bear came to be regarded by the tribe with little less awe than his master.

However, I must not linger too long over this part of my narrative, but hasten on to more stirring scenes.

It soon became evident that the unavoidable exposure, the sad trials which she had undergone, and the intense rigour of the Siberian climate had broken the constitution of the exile's wife, and the time came—it was in the brief but burning summer—when she could no longer wander through the woods with her little son, and Rurick the bear for a body-guard, but had to lie on the couch of moss spread beneath a shady birch tree by the watchful Irmac, whilst the unhappy exile, who perceived but too clearly the terrible blow that was about to fall upon him, sat by her side, holding her thin bloodless hand, and looking despairingly on the pale cheek that already bore the impress of the Destroyer's seal. The sound of laughter caused the eyes of both to turn towards a neighbouring sapling into which little Paul had climbed, and was playfully taunting Rurick, who was compelled by his weight to keep below, where he sat on his hind-quarters, looking up longingly at his companion.

“Paul,” she said, “he must be sent away from this wilderness directly I am gone. It will go nigh to break your heart, darling, to lose us both, but I should not sleep quietly beneath my summer mound of emerald green, or my winter covering of spotless snow”—the exile groaned

and hid his face with both hands—"if I thought that he, the only pledge of our love—and I have loved you, my Paul—was to be brought up a godless barbarian in this awful wilderness."

"To whom can I send him?" asked the man despairingly, "and who would take him?"

"My brother George would receive our child gladly for his mother's sake, and I have prepared a letter with my dying wishes which must accompany the boy. I have George's address in London, and if he has moved, his new abode can easily be found."

"But who is to take him?" asked the convict wearily, for the very idea of losing both wife and child was tugging hard at his heart-strings.

"Irmac," returned the invalid promptly. "He has promised me; has sworn by all he holds sacred to convey the child to England, and deliver him into the hands of my brother."

"Irmac!" repeated the man, with despair more apparent in his tone—"Irmac! Why, Oelgchen, faithful as the poor fellow is he would be lost in any civilized country. Half a savage himself, and knowing no language but Russian and the native jargon of these wilds, how could he pursue inquiries of some delicacy in a foreign land—if he ever reached it, which seems improbable? Think calmly, my loved one, of all the

danger, risk, and fatigue that your scheme involves ; think of me, robbed of all that I hold dear, and abandon this rash project. There may yet be a turn in the wheel of Fortune, and then . . .”

“I see all the dangers—God knows how for months past, ever since my doom was sealed, I have dwelt upon them—but some secret voice within me whispers that we shall succeed, and that our child shall be brought up as befits his birth and station. Paul, my beloved, from the day our hands were joined in one I have striven ever to do my duty—and the task was a light one, since where true affection exists all comes easy—and I shall continue to do so until you close my eyes upon this earthly scene, and lay me to rest beneath those drooping birches. By the memory of that devotion, then, I implore you to lighten my last hours by granting this request. You will, Paul—husband—love—you will—I see it in your eyes. Now I shall die content,” she added, as the convict, bending down to kiss her damp brow, murmured, “It shall be done, my wife, though I sink under the weight of sorrow.”

For several minutes no further word was spoken, the woman overpowered by emotion and exhaustion, the man dwelling on the bereave-

ment so close before him—a load of sorrow that his promise told him must now be borne *alone*. At length she spoke again, and this time with less of despair in her weak tones, but rather an eager desire to infuse some of her own hopes into the breast of the stricken listener kneeling beside her.

“I have made all arrangements with Irmac, Paul, and he, faithful fellow, will carry out my wishes to the death. That the boy should depart in the ordinary way the cruel penal laws of Russia render impossible, for by sharing your exile we lost our rights, and are virtually as much prisoners as the unhappy wretches in the mines. The authorities then would step in and prevent the child from leaving the country; whilst to smuggle him through Siberia and Russia without the greatest risk of discovery would be impossible. There does exist, however, one way in which the escape can be effected, and the credit of inventing it is due entirely to Irmac. Bizarre and extravagant as the plan sounds, you must embrace it, for I feel within me the certainty of its ultimate success. Briefly it is this:—Irmac will assume the part of a travelling juggler, and his staff will consist of our child and Rurick the bear!

“You open your eyes with astonishment, my

Paul, and at the first blush the scheme appears absurd, but reflect on it dispassionately for a few minutes, and you will see that there can be none better. Irmac is faithful as steel, and regards our darling with a love and humble reverence that neither time nor place can shake. All the respect he owes you and the affection he bears towards me will be centred in the child, whom he will guard as the apple of his eye. From his position as wizard he has learnt numberless tricks in which both little Paul and Rurick can take part ; whilst the journey will be lightened, for the party can proceed openly along the beaten high road instead of skulking through by-paths, and whilst attracting sympathy from the villagers by their poverty and amusing them by their grotesque feats, they will excite no suspicion whatever in the minds of the authorities, and can cross the frontier into Europe, and from thence, if necessary, into Germany, unquestioned and unmolested. What think you of Irmac's scheme now, my Paul ? Does it not carry success in its very boldness and originality ?”

The convict knelt, listening with quivering lips and dimmed eyes, but as the plan was unfolded a flush rose to his colourless cheek and a frown knotted the smooth brow. It would be thought that obloquy, privation, and sorrow, past

and to come, had crushed the spirit of this outcast, and that pride had long ceased to find a dwelling-place in one so abject. But it was not so, and on hearing that his child—the only son of his Oelgchen—was to wander about the country in the company of a Cossack adventurer and a tame bear, whilst amusing a crowd of gaping peasants by grotesque mummeries, the pride of race and high station forced itself to the surface, and a look of haughty indignation became visible on the features. It needed, however, but one light touch from the dying woman's hand, and one reproachful glance from her deep blue eyes, to banish this unwonted visitor from the exile's breast.

"Pardon, Oelgchen," he said with faltering voice and downcast face—"pardon that the old leaven will sometimes assert its existence, and that for one brief moment I was tempted to forget my wrongs and my thralldom, and to think as the man I once was, instead of as the nameless outcast that tyranny has made me. What am I that pride should find root in my heart?" he continued humbly. "Ought I not rather to thank God for the blessing He has vouchsafed to me, and pray to Him for strength to bear the new trials that He has appointed? Rest contented, my wife ; our little one shall go."

"See here," continued the woman, drawing from beneath her head a small packet wrapped in birch-bark and fur. "Within this parcel is contained the letter to my brother and our boy's baptismal certificate, together with half of the diamonds that I brought away—the remaining half you will find in the tent. These are worth a large sum of money, and if Irmac fails to find George they will support Paul and him in comfort for the rest of their lives. But I anticipate no such unfortunate ending, for the conviction is firm within me that the boy and his uncle will meet, and that in George our only son will find a friend and protector. Now kiss me, husband, then carry me into the tent, for the sun—like me—is sinking to rest."

Ten days later and the convict's gentle wife was released from the pain and trouble of this world, and the heart-broken husband laid her in that beautiful valley, flushed with its wealth of midsummer vegetation, selecting for the grave a small hillock that rose beside the bubbling stream. Later on, lads, I saw the spot with my own eyes, and it was passing beautiful—so lovely, calm, and peaceful as hardly to bear the intrusion of the costly marble tomb which now crowns the summit of the mound and testifies to the undying love of the convict No. 458.

How I came to visit so out-of-the-way a place you will learn before this story is ended, and I think it requires little more explanation from me to show how Irmac, little Paul, and his chum Rurick came to be landed in England.

One thing, however, may puzzle you—the peculiar dress worn by the nondescript, which made me imagine that I beheld an animal rather than a human being. The explanation is simple enough. The cold was intense on board the *Fly-by-night*, so Irmac had made the little fellow don his professional furs, to the great amusement of the crew. In these Siberian winter garments the gloves are part and parcel of the coat-sleeve, with a slit in the palm of each, out of which the bare hand is protruded if necessary.

Do you understand it all now? If not you had better wait until the autumn, and then ask

But I must restrain my discursive propensities, and not reveal state secrets at this stage of the yarn.





CHAPTER IX.

OUR NEW FRIENDS.



MUST now pass over all detail, and relate the events of the next eighteen months in a few words.

Little Paul, the huge Siberian Irmac, and Rurick the bear were my father's guests during the whole of this time, which I shall always look back to as perhaps the happiest period of my life. Three such play-mates—so strange and yet so affectionate—I feel sure that boy never had. Paul, with his shy old-fashioned ways, was entirely different from an English lad. He had never known the companionship of boys, but had been brought up entirely with his elders, and in consequence he possessed little of the boisterous and mischievous spirit common to youth, but displayed an old-fashioned gravity of disposition which would have been absolutely ludicrous had it not

been for a certain unconscious dignity of bearing which prevented even me, rude urchin as I was, from laughing at his courtly airs. These, I may mention, were a source of great delight to my father, who loved to draw the little fellow out and see the grace and ease with which he would extricate himself from the most embarrassing situation. Paul and I were inseparable. Being the eldest I looked upon myself as the child's protector, and the little kindnesses which I was enabled to show were acknowledged on his part by an almost passionate attachment—a clinging, self-sacrificing love resembling that of a girl rather than a boy. Not that there was anything feminine about Paul except in his manner and his affection for those around him, for in my pilgrimage of over threescore years I have never met the man who possessed his courage both moral and physical. Bodily fear seemed quite unknown to him, whilst his quiet scorn for any prevarication or petty meanness was indicative of a mode of education and a natural strength of character as uncommon as it was unlooked-for in a little fellow of his tender years and delicate appearance. He picked up English with surprising quickness and facility, and soon showed that his ability was infinitely superior to mine, since without apparent effort he ranged

up abreast of me in our studies, and would speedily have shot ahead and left me hull down had not love for his less quick-witted friend caused him to shorten sail and keep alongside of him. This, too, was done without the slightest ostentation, and was in thorough keeping with the delicacy which distinguished his every action.

I now pass on to the next of our new acquaintances, Irmac, and when I think of that good, simple-hearted fellow, memory carries me back at one bound to those old, old days in quiet Shoreham, and I scarcely know whether to laugh or cry as I recall the huge figure of the half-savage Siberian, and see again his flat, colourless face lighted up by a pair of small restless eyes that twinkled incessantly with mingled fun and cunning, and imparted a most comical aspect to a countenance which otherwise could scarcely be accounted highly favoured by nature. But then the giant strength of the fellow, his inexhaustible good-nature, his servile respect for little Paul, whom he would never address but with uncovered head, and, above all, his countless tricks and his skill with the axe!

At first the good folk of Shoreham took poor Irmac for something uncanny, since he would go in our boat outside the harbour, armed with a line

and a hook of his own manufacture, a clumsy-looking, awkward implement made by splicing a couple of bones together in a fashion unknown to these shores, and with this uncouth apparatus he would half fill the boat in a couple of hours. The regular fishermen were taken flat aback, and not best pleased either when they saw the Siberian giant hauling in the fish hand over fist whilst their baits were scarcely visited by a nibble. Up they came as soon as the bone hooks reached the bottom—dabs, flounders, whiting pouts, pollack, wrasse, eels, three at a time, one after the other, as fast as fresh bait could be put on and the line flung overboard. It seemed more like magic than fair fishing, and the result of such success was that Irmac at first had rather a lively time of it with the incensed waterside population of Shoreham, who appeared to think that British fish showed remarkably bad taste in preferring a foreigner's hook to theirs. But the Russian's unfailing good-humour was proof against all manifestations of ill-will, and by one of those curious revulsions of feeling which are not uncommon amongst the lower orders, he became as popular as he had been the reverse, after he had shown the most splendid skill and intrepidity by going out alone, in a gale of wind, to the rescue of a collier brig that had been

dismasted and was driving ashore. His pluck saved the crew, and the gallant deed caused the tide to veer round strongly in the Siberian's favour, so that soon he was in as great request as formerly he had been shunned. This was well enough in its way, but the consequence of being a general favourite was that poor Irmac got a great deal more grog than was good for him, and was often in a state of semi-intoxication for days on a stretch. He never became absolutely tipsy, it was hardly in the power of liquor to affect him to that extent, but he was in a muddled condition from which he could only be rescued by Paul. Expostulations from my father were useless, but if his young master scolded him in the Russian tongue the tears would spring from the great fellow's eyes, he would fall on his knees to fondle the hands of the boy, and no earthly persuasion would induce him to touch spirits again for another month. The influence that little Paul, a mere child, had over his huge henchman was one of the most remarkable things I have ever witnessed in my life.

Rurick, the bear, we kept chained up in an outhouse as far removed as possible from the stables, for his presence made the horses restless, and on that account my father would willingly

have been clear of the brute ; but both Paul and Irmac pleaded so earnestly for their favourite's retention that their wishes carried the day, and he became one of the family, although unquestionably the most useless. The creature's affection for Paul exceeded anything I ever saw, and once when the boy was confined to his bed for a week, poor Rurick fretted until his life was in danger, and I really believe he would have died had not Irmac taken him up-stairs to the room in which his young master was lying. The clumsy joy of the brute on seeing the pale little wistful face was most touching, though Martha fled precipitately from this strange visitor at a sick-bed. When we went out in the boat Rurick always accompanied us, and would behave with the most solemn decorum, sitting up in the bows and wagging his great head from side to side in an approving fashion as Irmac hauled the fish in three at a time. Had my father seriously thought of getting rid of the animal there would have been no difficulty in doing so, as in those days the cruel amusement of bear-baiting was still practised, and a noble brute such as Rurick would have fetched a large sum of money from any enterprising member of the sporting fraternity.

I must here mention that although, perhaps

owing to the clumsy method in which I have developed my story, you lads can form a pretty accurate idea concerning the identity of little Paul, and have doubtless recognized him long since as my Aunt Olga's son and my first cousin, yet at that time this close kinship was entirely unsuspected by me, although I fancy my father had an inkling of the truth from the beginning. From his long residence in St. Petersburg he could speak Russian as well as English, and hence was able to communicate freely with Irmac, and ascertain facts which to one ignorant of the Siberian's native tongue would have been impossible. But faithful and staunch though the man was, he remained always a prey to suspicion—a habit, I suppose, engendered by his previous mode of life, and the constant deceit and trickery he had been compelled to resort to in order to impress and maintain his ascendancy over the savage tribe by whom he was regarded as almost a supernatural being. However that may be, the fact remains that while professing the utmost candour and openness he was in reality extremely reticent, and my father was only able to piece together imperfectly the information which he extracted at odd times from this unwilling witness.

Poor Irmac! there was much to be said in

palliation of this concealment, for he had passed his entire life in a realm where liberty or freedom are unknown, and where it becomes the main object of each individual to conceal his thoughts from his neighbours, and even from those whom in other more favoured countries he could trust implicitly. Those whose misfortune it is to be born and bred in such an atmosphere of distrust find it hard to shake off the habits of a lifetime, or to realize that on setting foot in our free England the bondage of the mind as well as of the body is loosed, and all suspicious concealment becomes not only foolish but actually blameworthy. This freedom of speech and liberty of action is a grand and glorious heritage, the birthright of every Englishman, and to be valued as his dearest possession. I, my dear lads, have travelled the wide world around, and visited many countries, under many forms of government, and the result of my observations is that ours is a favoured land and a God-fearing land, so that every night before laying myself down to rest I humbly thank the Almighty, who has accorded me the privilege of calling myself an Englishman, a unit amongst that mighty race who have not rested content with the achievement of their own freedom, but who have struck the shackles off the slave, and carried the glad

tidings of the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth.

If Irmac had been thoroughly open with my father how much better it would have been ! Whilst freely relating all the circumstances connected with the Exile, No. 458, and his wife, and also the manner in which he and the child had escaped from Siberia, nothing would induce him to reveal the name of the unfortunate convict. That the latter was a man of very high family—a great noble, a prince—was all that my father could drag from him, and it has since often struck me that the poor fellow was really as ignorant as he professed to be. But his suspicions went far beyond this, since they led him to conceal the letter addressed to my father himself, the presentation of which would have cleared up all doubt, and shown little Paul to be Prince Loriskoff's only son, and the nephew of the man into whose care he had fallen by such an extraordinary chapter of accidents. Not an inkling did my father gain of the existence of such a document until certain circumstances which I am about to relate had happened, and then our family party was broken up, and the information attained seemed cause rather for sorrow than rejoicing.

This will explain itself in a few pages ; mean-

while I must state that, whilst suppressing the all-important letter, Irmac handed over to my father the valuable jewels of which he was the faithful custodian. These my father caused to be locked up safely in his London bank, intending to apply the proceeds from their sale to little Paul's future advancement, could no authentic information be obtained with regard to his name and parentage. To this latter end he set in motion all available machinery at St. Petersburg, but communication in those days was slow and uncertain, whilst the authorities showed the utmost reluctance to give any information concerning a state prisoner. A Siberian exile has politically ceased to live, and all inquiries were met with polite but palpable evasions, so that my father could learn nothing reliable, more particularly as old John Powerscourt, who might really have found out the truth, refused to interest himself in the matter.

So owing to Irmac's stupid concealment and to my grandfather's unabated anger against his disobedient daughter, my father was unable to verify the fact which nevertheless he felt sure of in his own heart—that the only son of his unfortunate sister Olga had been brought under his care and protection in a manner so singular, so mysterious, and so unexpected as to indicate

the workings of a Higher Power throughout the whole course of events. That his surmise proved true, and that by the discovery of Olga's letter little Paul's parentage was ascertained beyond doubt, will now be shown, as also how, by a most unforeseen accident, the knowledge came too late to be of much use either to the lad or to his uncle.

For a long time I have promised to take you youngsters to sea with me, so now I am about to keep my word, and I only hope when you first make acquaintance with the troubled waters of the English Channel it may be under more favourable auspices than those which befell your old grandfather at the close of last century—the brave old time when we were thrashing the French wherever we met them, when the name of our great naval hero Nelson was on every tongue, and the sight of his flag would send the enemy scattering panic-stricken over the ocean like a flock of wild ducks disturbed by the fowler.

Brave old days, my lads, when the banner of St. George flew aloft to some purpose! Alas! we shall never look upon the like again.



CHAPTER X.

ADrift.

AS I mentioned before, eighteen months had passed away since the eventful evening at the 'Sussex Pad' which had resulted in three new inmates being domiciled beneath our quiet roof. This year and a half had seen me grow into a stout boy of fourteen, and had also procured me an appointment as volunteer of the first-class to His Majesty's ship *Canopus*, then engaged with the English fleet in hunting the Frenchmen about the Mediterranean, or boxing them up so tightly under the guns of their fortifications that they did not dare to show a strip of canvas on the bright sea. I had been to Portsmouth with my father, little Paul, and Irmac, but finding that no vessel was to carry supernumeraries up the Straits for a fortnight, I had obtained leave from the commanding officer of the guardship—

he was heartily glad to get rid of a young greenhorn, since his vessel was crowded with youngsters awaiting a passage—to spend ten days with my father at Shoreham, and thither we had returned, somewhat to my chagrin, for I was longing to begin my new life in earnest; but I managed to find some consolation in showing off my kerseymere tights, blue coat, and dirk to the fishermen of Shoreham; and derived intense satisfaction from consulting the ponderous gold watch which my father had most kindly given me, and which I carried in a fob, worked in the waistband of my breeches, with a broad ribbon and seals dangling over my attenuated stomach.

A pretty ape I must have looked! and I am sure I gave myself airs enough for a whole menagerie of monkeys.

On the strength of my new rank and the splendour of my uniform, I bestowed an unwonted amount of patronage on poor little Paul who stared at me wonderingly with his great blue eyes, and one morning I filled his heart with joy by announcing that I would take him out fishing in the big boat on condition that Irmac did not accompany us. As an officer in His Majesty's service I felt myself quite competent to manage the biggest craft that ever left the mouth of the Adur, and I scorned the help of

the Siberian as well as the advice which I felt sure he would tender. It is needless to say that this boastful arrangement was made without the knowledge of my father, who would certainly have sternly prohibited such an expedition, for a strong north-easterly breeze was blowing, and with a falling glass the weather outlook was about as bad as it could be.

Breakfast over, away we started for the Raptackle, or Ropewalk, at New Shoreham, where our big boat was moored, accompanied by Irmac and Rurick, the latter of whom had long since ceased to attract any attention in the town. When all our preparations were complete poor Irmac made an attempt to step over the gunwale, but with the short-sighted pride that was strong within me I ordered him on shore again, and he stood on the beach shaking his head warningly as we mast-headed the sail, and with Rurick seated gravely in the bows stood out to seaward, both Paul and I shouting aloud with joy in a new-born sense of freedom, as the breeze bellied out the sail and the boat danced gaily over the gentle swell.

From my earliest childhood I had been accustomed to a boat, and could manage one very fairly, whether under oars or sail, but I had not much knowledge of the tides, and a thorough

acquaintance with both ebb and flow are requisite to form a good boatman in the English Channel, where the current often runs like a mill-race. Little Paul, too, was a very fair sailor, having had plenty of practice in boating since he came to live with us; but he was not nearly so strongly built as I was, and far less fitted to encounter hardship and privation. We had a small keg full of water and a basket of provisions with us, which, together with the hooks, lines, and bait, formed our entire equipment. The rig of the boat was a standing lug and jib, with a small mizzen and bumpkin over the stern, a very handy fashion for a large craft with few hands. A dipping lug would have been unmanageable by a couple of youngsters.

Away we went, running dead before the wind in a south-westerly direction, making for a spot some five miles off Worthing, where, years before, a billy-boy laden with blocks of stone from Portland, and bound for Chatham, had sunk in a gale, when all her small crew, including the skipper's wife, had perished. The huge squared blocks of masonry could still be seen on a calm day beneath the water, although masses of seaweed had accumulated round them, forming an excellent shelter for fish, which frequented the spot in shoals. Indeed it was the best ground

between the villages of Brighthelmston and Bognor, but only a select few of the oldest fishermen on the coast knew its exact whereabouts, and to drop the killick over the very place was no slight test of good seamanship. Only in fine clear weather could this be accomplished, since only then were the cross-bearings on shore visible, and the slightest error would cause the boat to drift wide of the mark. Twenty—nay, ten fathoms to east or west made all the difference; if you were that distance wide of the spot not a fish would nibble at your bait; whereas the certainty of excellent sport awaited you if the lines could be let down amongst the blocks themselves.

In those days the dim old eyes which now require glasses to read the largest print were sharp as needles, and picking up the bearings cleverly, I sent little Paul forward to the halliards, and as I put the helm down and brought the boat to the wind, the sail came rattling down, when, springing forward, I seized the grapnel and let it go just to windward of the ground. As she tautened her cable, I saw with great satisfaction that the bearings were perfectly accurate, and felt sure that the boat must be immediately over the wreck; but as she swung head to wind I observed with less pleasure what a heavy sea

there was on, and how the old hooker buried her nose in each wave.

Neither of us, however, were inclined for reflection, and in a couple of minutes the lines were over the side.

"I've got him, Frank," cried little Paul, hauling up hand over fist, and flinging a couple of fine whiting over the gunwale.

"So have I," was my reply, as a smart tug warned me that my bait was taken and the prey firmly hooked.

For over two hours we continued to haul up the lines until our arms were tired, and we counted over fifteen score of fish as the result of our day's work. Then we ate our bread and meat, and had a pull out of the water-keg, and it was immediately after this that, looking to windward, I saw that a heavy black wind-cloud was brooding over the Downs, and that the fleecy scud was flying faster than ever. Just then, also, it struck me that we had six or seven miles of a dead beat, if we meant to sleep in our beds that night; whilst furthermore, I remarked with dismay that the tide was strong against us, and running to the westward with great speed, whilst knocking up a very ugly chopping sea by crossing athwart the wind.

"We must take down all reefs before lifting

the killick," I remarked to Paul. "Come along and let's look alive, and make Rurick lie down quietly in the bottom of the boat." For the great brute was beginning to show signs of uneasiness, whether caused by hunger, thirst, or the jerking motion I am unable to say.

To reef the sail took only a few minutes, and then, after sending Paul to the helm with directions to put it hard a-larboard—they call it 'port' in these days—directly the anchor was tripped, I went into the eyes of the boat and dragged at the cable. Some few fathoms of rope I gained, but to lift the grapnel was quite beyond my strength even with Paul's assistance. Probably one of the palms had slipped under some portion of the submerged masonry; at all events the anchor was immovable, and as every minute was now precious, there remained nothing but to cut the cable.

"Jam the helm to larboard," I sung out whilst sawing at the rope with my open knife. "Slack off the mizzen-sheet. There she goes," and with a crack the severed strands parted, whilst the boat's head fell off before the strip of foresail that I bore out to windward, and at the same moment a green sea, catching her on the port bow—I shall use the modern phraseology—deluged me from head to foot, and drew forth a

sound, half roar, half moan, from Rurick, who came in for a very fair share of the ducking.

"Steady with the helm; keep it amidship," I sung out, whilst putting all my weight on the fore-halliards, and in a couple of minutes the close-reefed sail was hoisted, the sheet hauled flat aft, and I had relieved little Paul at the helm, whilst the boat went plunging and careering like a restive horse, with her head lying about east by south.

"Get the bailer, Paul; lift the bottom-board and take the water out of her," I cried, for showers of spray churned up over the weather-bow and a good portion of it fell inboard. "Don't be in a funk, little chap, we shall weather it all right."

"I'm in no funk," replied the boy, looking at me smilingly with his clear blue eyes. "I only wish we had some grub for Rurick, Frank, the poor old fellow's hungry."

"Bother Rurick," was my ungracious reply, "he must shift for himself. Only keep him still at the bottom of the boat, for if he begins any skylarking in this sea, we shall be capsized to a certainty."

Having finished bailing, the boy sat down beside his favourite, soothing him and playing with his ears. It was a pretty sight, which I

could not help remarking, notwithstanding our awkward position, and I have often found myself thinking of it since, and wondering how it would have struck any third person, had one been present to witness it.

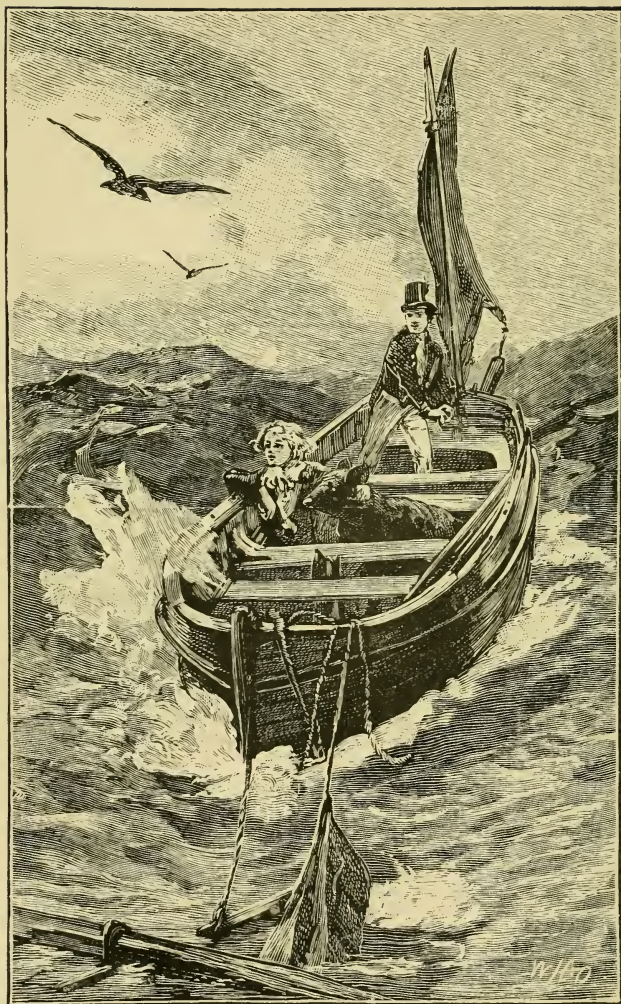
It was now a little past four o'clock, as a hurried glance at my watch told me, and the bearing of the different objects on shore showed me, to my deep mortification, that we were sagging out rapidly to seaward, but not making a single yard of headway. The old boat was sailing well, standing up to both wind and sea as bravely as could be expected of her, but the strong tide bore her bodily to leeward, and I perceived with dismay that we should do little good on that tack, at all events until the flood set in, and that would not happen for many hours.

"I tell you what, Paul," I cried, after watching the land minutely, and seeing that we were actually losing ground, "this sort of thing won't do. We shall find ourselves in the middle of the Channel by sunset if we bag to leeward at this pace. The best thing to do is to bear up and run for the mouth of the Arun; it is the only shelter to the westward within fifty miles. Stand by to shift over the fore-sheet. We must wear her, and I'll look out for a lull, so that the sail won't jibe too suddenly. We

ought to lower the yard properly, but it takes such a time to get it aloft again."

Paul quitted his place by Rurick's head and went to the sheet. I put the helm up gently and off fell the boat's bow, whilst the sharp jerking motion became easier at every instant. Now she was almost dead before the wind, and I was telling Paul to shift over the sheet, when a sudden squall came whistling down through Findon Gap, flinging the sail violently across and wrenching the block out of the boy's hand. With a report almost as loud as a pistol the canvas flowed out, flogging the air viciously; then there came an ominous crack, the sail gave a final plunge as though to free itself from all trammels, and with a crash sail and gear disappeared under the bows—we were dismasted!

"Are you hurt, Paul?" I shouted, whilst hauling aft the mizzen-sheet to bring the helpless boat head to wind. "Are you hurt?" for I was in a terrible fright lest the sheet-block might have struck him on the head—and many a good man has had his brains dashed out by a flogging block—but the little chap smiled quietly back, so motioning him to the helm, I sprang forward, and tried to unhook the tack of the jib, which was holding the mast to the boat, and causing me the greatest alarm, for I feared



Frank and Paul adrift.—p. 145.

lest the heavy sea should drive the jagged end of the spar against the boat's bows, and thus make a hole which would send her to the bottom in half a minute.

The strain on the sail was so great that my strength was insufficient to release it, and I was about to sever the canvas with my knife when I noticed that the wreckage not only served to keep the boat head to the wind, but also formed a kind of breakwater whereby the full force of the waves was much diminished. To cut away this valuable protection would be folly; it only remained to secure the floating mast and sail at such a distance from the boat as would prevent a collision, and for this purpose I bent the end of the grapnel-rope to the jib, cut the tack, and veered to the full extent of my remaining cable.

With the mizzen-sheet hauled flat aft we now remained head to the wind, but I saw in a moment that all hope of reaching the shore was out of the question. Certainly we had oars in the boat, but a couple of tired youngsters could have made no headway against the rising wind and sea, for as the sun sank down to the westward the weather became more threatening, and I saw plainly that we were in for a regular dirty night.

I cannot say that the adventure had troubled

me much so far, for I had been in action ever since we left the fishing-ground and had found no time to think, but now when there was nothing to do but to sit idly on the thwart, watching the land slowly receding as the tide swept the boat to the southward and westward, scanning the horizon in vain for a friendly sail, looking into the wistful eyes of little Paul, and listening to the uneasy grunts of Rurick, then, I say, my folly in going to sea without Irmac came fully home to me, and I bit my lips with vexation as I thought of all that my silly pride was likely to cost us.

Poor little Paul was as staunch as steel and never uttered a word of complaint, but I could see his eyes fixed on the now distant coast, and then for the first time it struck me what terrible anxiety this escapade would cause to my poor father and to the faithful Siberian, and with the thought came an all too late repentance for my culpable rashness.

As matters stood we were in little real danger, for it was the height of summer and no gale would be of long duration, or extreme severity. A night spent in an open boat was no such great hardship after all, and with daylight on the following morning we were pretty sure to be picked up, since the Channel was swarming

with cruisers, privateers, and smugglers. I only hoped that ill-luck would not drop us athwart the bows of a Frenchman, for then a prison would be our doom. Even such very small fish as we were would be a welcome prize to the Johnny Crapauds, who scarcely took a prisoner at sea from one year's end to another, and would have raised a terrific shout of self-glory over the capture of two boys. I was an officer, in uniform too!—adrift in an open boat after a peaceful fishing expedition. No, there was little real danger, but a good deal of discomfort to be dreaded, for the keen fresh air and the exercise had made us very hungry, and unfortunately there was nothing to eat except raw fish, and we were not yet reduced to the extremity of touching such abhorrent food. Rurick also was a source of anxiety. We gave him some water out of the keg, which he lapped greedily, but the poor brute's uneasy moans showed that he was half-famished, and, if the pangs of hunger really assailed him in earnest, I was much afraid lest his ferocious nature would re-assert itself, when it would be a very bad look-out for *me*, since not even famine would have induced him to lay a paw upon Paul.

There is an old naval yarn about a bear adrift in a wash-tub ; let me tell you, lads, that your

poor old grandfather came very near to verifying that ancient legend.

By the time the sun sank, the land was only a faint loom to the northward, and with the descending darkness it became lost to view altogether. Contrary to my expectations the wind lulled considerably, the sky cleared away, and the stars shone brilliantly, but there still remained too strong a breeze for us to think of making headway against it with the oars. Clearly the only thing to be done was to remain quiet and see what luck daylight would bring us, so I sent little Paul to sleep, when he curled himself up in the bottom of the boat with Rurick for a pillow, thus serving the double purpose of resting himself and keeping the bear quiet.

It was my firm intention to have kept watch manfully throughout the night. As an officer in His Majesty's Service, placed unexpectedly in a position of great trust and responsibility, I conceived it my duty to keep a vigilant lookout to insure the safety of my companion, and I earnestly strove to do so; but somehow or other, after half an hour, I found the stars winking and blinking in a most extraordinary fashion, and then suddenly fading from sight as though they had been sponged out of the vault

of heaven, whilst my head betrayed an irresistible tendency to sink forward on my breast. Several times I recovered an upright position with a sudden jerk, stared solemnly around as though keeping awake were the easiest feat in the world, and sleep the last thing that I desired; then, despite of resolves and the possible danger of being run down by some cruiser, the motion of the boat and the fatigue of the day together overpowered me, and I slid off the stern-sheets on to the bottom-boards, sound asleep.

How many hours I remained in that position I know not, but I was brought to my senses with a start by hearing a hoarse voice that sounded in my very ear, shouting "Boat ahoy!"

With a bound I regained my feet, but almost staggered backward again in terror as I saw—it was broad daylight—towering above the boat, and seeming to my confused faculties as though about to overwhelm her, the lofty canvas of a full-rigged ship, which was standing down Channel with a spanking breeze on the star-board quarter.

"We are adrift and starving," I shouted back shrilly in my boyish tones, as the huge vessel dashed past us so closely that the foam from her bows splashed us, and we could plainly see

the row of curious heads peering down on us over the netting; and a queer sight we must have presented—a pair of urchins in a dismasted boat, with a half-starved Russian bear as a companion.

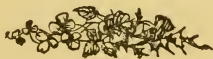
Swiftly and gracefully the beautiful frigate passed us by, her guns yawning grimly through the ports, and her copper sheathing shining like burnished gold, but before her mizzen-chains were abreast of us, I heard an order from the quarter-deck, sharp, clear, and decisive—an order that filled my heart with joy, for it was in English.

“Hands shorten sail!” cried the voice, and immediately there arose the shrill sound of the boatswain’s pipes, and we could see the top-men hurrying aloft to take in the top-gallant studding sails. Then the helm was put down, the fluttering, flying kites were gathered in as though by magic as she came to the wind; with a stamp and a sally that we could plainly hear, the mainsail rose and hung drooping in the bunt and leach-lines; whilst at the same moment the main-brace was let go, and the heavy yards swung square and aback—the frigate was hove too!

In a moment I had cut the grapnel-rope adrift, and had, with the help of little Paul,

rigged out the oars, but our best efforts hardly moved the heavy craft, and it was with sincere joy that I saw the starboard cutter drop from the frigate's davits and pull direct for us.

In five minutes she had towed us alongside, when a shout of laughter that no discipline could repress arose from the ship's company, as Rurick grabbed the gangway-cleats and disappeared inboard like a lamplighter. Paul and I followed at a more sober pace, and then we found ourselves on the quarter-deck of the strange vessel—I in my soaked and tarnished uniform, little Paul with his golden curls tangled and one hand twisted tight in the fur of Rurick's neck. There we stood, the centre of a hundred curious eyes, perhaps three as extraordinary waifs as it had ever been given to the captain of one of His Majesty's ships to rescue from hunger and thirst, if not from greater trials.





CHAPTER XI.

H. M. S. 'VIGILANT.'

HERE we stood, surrounded by a group of wondering officers, whilst the men gathered aft along the gangways as far as the mainmast, impelled by a curiosity which set all discipline temporarily at defiance. I hung down my head abashed at the thought of my slovenly appearance, for the sea-water had taken all the freshness out of my uniform, and, moreover, I was conscious that when the inevitable series of questions concerning the incidents that had befallen us came to be put, that my foolhardiness would meet with the censure which it certainly deserved. Little Paul, on the contrary, showed neither uneasiness nor shyness, but peered slowly round at the group of officers with his large blue eyes, and at once picked out the captain of the frigate, who stood a little

in front of the rest, with a comical smile on what would otherwise have been a very stern, severe face. Having detected this potentate, to my intense astonishment, and somewhat to my dismay, for I knew from hearsay how unapproachable a personage the captain of a man-of-war was, my small companion in distress broke the silence. Without relinquishing his grasp of Rurick's furry neck, he raised his cap with the disengaged hand, and making one of his little courtly bows to the officer, addressed him thus—

“If you please, sir, would you be kind enough to let my bear have some water and meat, the poor animal is starving.”

The request was a pretty cool one, considering the circumstances in which we were placed, but there was a confiding innocence about little Paul which I never found any one capable of resisting, and I feel sure that this bold, direct, and unvarnished appeal on behalf of the boy's brute friend went straight to the heart of the captain, for I noticed the amused smile on his face broaden, and little Paul must have remarked it too, for he still further astonished us by advancing straight up to the officer—still leading Rurick—and placing his small hand confidently in his palm.

“You will have him fed, sir, won't you?” he

continued, looking up beseechingly into the great man's face.

Then the captain broke silence, but I saw that it cost him some trouble to keep from laughing outright, though I also noticed that the boy's fearless appeal to his protection and sympathy had not been taken in vain, for the little hand was still retained in his, and a visible softness came over the sternly-moulded features.

"Certainly, your bear shall be fed—and I only hope he won't help himself from the sheep-pens!—but who are you, my boy?"

"I am Prince Paul," returned the little chap, drawing himself up to the full extent of his fifty inches, and making another bow with the slight admixture of hauteur which always accompanied any reference to his high birth; "but I am very grateful to you for taking care of poor Rurick," he continued, dropping down from his high horse, and looking up into the captain's face with a sunny smile.

"This is a curious affair, Sterne," said the latter, addressing an officer whom I soon found to be the first lieutenant; "fill again, and make all sail that she will carry. Tell the purser's steward to soak a dozen pounds of bread,* and give it to the bear. I suppose your pet is not

* Ship's biscuit is always known as 'bread' in the navy.

dangerous, young gentleman?" he continued, putting the question to me, of whom no one had yet taken any particular notice.

I murmured something unintelligible in reply, but little Paul had all his wits about him, and at once got me clear of the dilemma.

"Rurick is very quiet and good, sir, when he is not frightened or hungry. Now he is both; but he always obeys me, and if you will show me some place I will tie him up until he becomes accustomed to the ship."

"Well, you're a strange little chap!" I heard the captain murmur, as he smiled round on the circle of officers. "Bring your pet down, and we will make him fast between two of the main-deck guns; then you shall give me an account of how all this came about. Come along, young gentleman," he continued, again addressing me, and turning round to walk below with Paul's hand still in his, and Rurick trotting by the latter's side.

"What are we to do with the boat, sir?" broke in the first lieutenant, touching his hat. "She is a large craft, too big to stow away on the booms."

"Cut her adrift after passing the fish in-board," said the captain. "But, stay; she may drift ashore and frighten the relations of these

youngsters. Heave a round-shot through her bottom, and then she'll be out of harm's way."

Whilst Paul was securing Rurick—the animal had a stout leather collar—on the main-deck I heard a crash, and rushing to the side I thrust my head through one of the ports to see our boat floating slowly astern, as the frigate gathered headway, and gradually sinking. Of course it was unreasonable to expect a smart frigate on active service to be hampered with a clumsy shore-boat, but somehow my heart sank within me as the stout old craft, which I had known from my earliest childhood, disappeared under the counter. It seemed like severing the last ties that bound us to the shore, to home, to my father, and it was in a very depressed and lachrymose mood that I followed the captain and little Paul into the former's cabin.

"Now, my lads, you're pretty hungry, I suppose," was our greeting when the sentry had closed the door behind us. "Hurry up with the breakfast, steward, and after that you can tell me all about it."

Captain Douglas was a stern man and a strict disciplinarian—what is known in the service as a 'taut hand'—but, notwithstanding, his heart was as soft as a woman's when the exigencies of his command did not necessitate the banishment

of all weakness, and the inherent nobility of his nature had not been warped by the almost absolute power lodged in the captain of a man-of-war in those days. I have often since reflected on the gentlemanlike feeling and tact which prompted him to set us two youngsters entirely at our ease before requiring us to explain our extraordinary position. I was not able to appreciate such thoughtful kindness then, but little Paul, who possessed a far keener insight into character, recognized the good intention at once, and when breakfast was over, made another courtly bow together with a short speech, which brought the blush up to my cheek, but only raised a covert smile on the face of Captain Douglas.

"Neither of you will have any more? Very well, clear away, steward, and desire the first lieutenant and Dr. Henderson to come to me. Now, young gentlemen," he continued, when the two officers in question had joined us, and were all seated in the after-cabin, "now explain how you and your bear came to be adrift in mid-channel on a summer morning?"

In answer to this I related the whole affair to the best of my power, but I was nervous from the knowledge that I had been foolhardy, and the presence in which I sat made me ill at ease. How I longed for even a small portion

of my companion's innocent nonchalance! He remained perfectly cool and unembarrassed, correcting me gently when in my hurry I made a wrong statement or became confused, and generally coming to my rescue when I halted and boggled in the course of the recital.

"And you are a volunteer of the first-class in the King's Service?" asked the captain.

"To what ship are you appointed?" he continued, when I had answered the first question in the affirmative.

"The *Canopus*, sir," I replied.

"The *Canopus*! I know her well. She is with the fleet under Lord Keith, blockading Malta just at present. How do you expect to reach her, may I ask?"

I was dumb, as well I might be, considering that I had not the smallest idea of even the name of the frigate that had picked us up, of the port from which she had sailed, or to what station she was bound.

"And you say your name is Frank Powerscourt, and that you live at Old Shoreham. Are you any relation to the George Powerscourt who married Miss Maldon?"

"He is my father, and my mother's name was Maldon," I replied, in a husky and trembling voice which sounded full of tears, despite my

strenuous efforts to restrain any display of weakness, but the question brought home to me the agony of anxiety under which my poor father must even at that moment be suffering, and I was too raw to be able to hide my feelings.

"Curious, Sterne, very curious!" said Captain Douglas, turning to his officers after a moment's pause. "Even you will admit that this is an extraordinary circumstance, doctor, when I tell you that poor Kate Maldon, that boy's mother, was my first cousin; that our childhood was passed together, and that . . ."

He paused suddenly, biting his under lip, and his eyes assumed a far-away sad expression as he turned away from his audience and fixed his gaze absently through the stern-windows on the distant cliffs of St. Katherine's, which were just visible. I noticed the first lieutenant glance covertly at the doctor, and remarked that the latter gentleman raised his eyebrows and gave a little shrug to his shoulders; but I sat on stolidly, hardly able yet to appreciate the value of a relative met under such strange circumstances, and little dreaming of what great influence this unexpected rencontre would exercise on the lives of myself and my companions. Little Paul again did a curious thing, showing how

acute his sympathies were, and how unerringly he read, by simple intuition, the human character, particularly in those who had shown him kindness, or to whom he had taken a liking. Whilst Captain Douglas was standing with his back, gazing absently out of the ports, the boy quietly arose, and approaching the silent figure gently, for the second time slipped his fingers into the officer's hand. This mute but earnest attempt at consolation—utterly unpremeditated, but the result of an entirely spontaneous impulse—must have touched the captain, for he allowed the little hand to rest in his, and when after the lapse of a minute or so he turned round and withdrew his palm, it was to lay it gently upon the head of the youngster, as though in grateful acknowledgment of the feeling which he had displayed.

“And now, my little fellow,” he said, drawing the boy close in front of him as he sat down, “let us hear something about you. What did you say your name was?”

“Prince Paul,” was the reply, with the customary dignity under such circumstances.

“Prince Paul what? You have a surname surely.”

The boy coloured up violently as he replied, “I do not remember any other name. There

must be one, but mamma would not let me know it lest I should be questioned and forced to tell a lie. Irmac knows, but he keeps it secret. I know my father was a great officer at the Emperor's Court ; now he is an exile living with savages who gain their livelihood by fur-trapping and hunting. My poor mother died of grief and exhaustion. Irmac knows, and could tell you all, but he is at Shoreham, and now I have no one left but Frank and Rurick—and *you*," he concluded, brushing away the unbidden tears that had started to his eyes, and looking the captain fearlessly in the face.

"His father is in Siberia," I ventured to explain, "and Paul escaped with a big Russian and the bear. It is eighteen months ago now since they landed in England, and they have stayed with us up to this time."

This led to the further questioning of Paul, and the little fellow, who was frankness itself, required little persuasion to relate his strange adventures, which were listened to with the deepest attention by all his auditors, to whom Siberia and its horrible penal settlements were wholly unknown except by the tongue of misleading rumour.

"Well, gentlemen," said the captain, when the story was concluded, "I can only see one

thing to do. I am carrying despatches to the West Indies, and it would be as much as my commission is worth to put into Plymouth or Falmouth. Both lads must remain on board, and the best thing I can think of is to put them on the ship's books at once. My young cousin here is already in the service, and the Admiralty will make no difficulty, when informed of the circumstances, in transferring him from the *Canopus* to the *Vigilant*. I regret, of course, that his father must be kept so many weeks in suspense, but it is unavoidable, and I will write to him and explain everything at the first opportunity. How do you like the idea of being a sailor, like your friend Frank?" continued the captain, turning to Paul.

"It was always understood that I was to go to sea when I was old enough, unless my father reclaimed me," replied the boy.

"That is good. Then, Mr. Sterne, will you set the tailor to work to knock up some kind of uniform for these young gentlemen until we get into harbour, when I will see to their proper equipment? They need not be put to duty for a day or two; and now go down to the berth, both of you, and make acquaintance with your new messmates. But stay a minute, Sterne, the little fellow must have a name. He can hardly

be entered on the books as 'Prince Paul' *pur et simple*. What shall we call him, doctor?"

The usual stock surnames of Brown, Jones, and Robinson were naturally suggested, but none of these took the fancy of Captain Douglas, who, after a few minutes' consideration, settled the question to his own satisfaction.

"Call him Maldon," he said—"Paul Maldon. It is a pretty name, and brings back pleasant recollections to me," and he swallowed down a sigh.

"I'll tell you what, doctor," I heard the first lieutenant whisper as soon as the cabin-door had closed behind us, "it is my belief that the skipper was in love with this young fellow's mother in his early days," and he jerked his thumb towards me.

"Can't say," replied the medico, who was a cautious man and slow to hazard an opinion; "but it looks like it."

Our stay in the cabin had occupied several hours, and it was six bells in the forenoon watch (eleven o'clock) when we stepped out on to the main-deck. Paul immediately made for the space between the two guns where he had tied up Rurick, but to our surprise the animal was not there. There was the tub in which a mess of soaked biscuit had been supplied to him, and

the rope's-end by which he had been fastened, but the creature himself was nowhere to be seen. Following the first lieutenant on to the quarter-deck, we saw the truant on the forecastle surrounded by blue-jackets, who were tempting him with biscuits and such other delicacies as their ship's allowance afforded. He seemed extremely happy under these attentions, sitting up with his back propped against the lee-nettings, and balancing his great body with much dexterity as the frigate rolled from side to side before the favouring wind. Not the smallest fear of the huge brute was manifested by the seamen, some of whom had evidently let the animal loose with the intention of making friends with him, which would have been a risky matter enough in any other situation ; but on board a ship a wild cat would be brought to its bearings in no time. No living creature can resist the mixture of familiarity and strictness with which a pet is treated by the crew, and nothing keeps the men more amused and contented than the possession of some animal—it matters little how savage, ugly, and generally unpromising—to spoil and make much of. The appearance in their midst of a huge brute like Rurick was a source of unqualified delight to the men of the *Vigilant*, and I fancy that both the captain and Mr.

Sterne regarded the new-comer with a kindly eye, although the latter, on principle, growled at the whiteness of his decks being sullied by "a beast with a hide like a thrum-mat," as it pleased him to describe our four-footed companion.

On observing us, Rurick broke through the circle of seamen around, and came rushing aft in a lumbering canter, upsetting a couple of boys who did not clear out of the way quickly enough, and on reaching Paul, reared himself up and began waggling his head about in token of joy. The sight was familiar to me, but created the greatest astonishment amongst the *Vigilant's* crew, who were delighted at the affection displayed by the animal; but seeing the black cloud that rose to Mr. Sterne's brow, Paul led the bear below and tied him up again.

As well have tried to chain up the wind. In less than a quarter of an hour some unknown hand had cast the rope adrift, and Rurick was once more on the forecastle being pampered, over-fed, and generally spoiled.

I have reason to believe that Captain Douglas had sent privately for the senior member of the midshipmen's berth, an old master's mate named Hodgson, and given him a hint that little Paul was not to be bullied or annoyed. This was

kindly meant but scarcely necessary, for the boy's extreme amiability made him a general favourite in a couple of days, by which time all the boisterous chaff at his title of 'Prince' had been expended, and he was left in peace on that score.

I was less fortunate. Being considered old and ugly enough to take care of myself, I had to fight my own way, and pretty tough work it was, although, as I always strove to be good-tempered, I also was not long in gaining the goodwill of my messmates and of the lieutenant in whose watch I was eventually placed.

One thing was greatly in our favour, that neither Paul nor I suffered from sea-sickness. Our constant boating excursions at Shoreham had rendered us completely proof against the malady, and we cared no more for the motion of the ship than the oldest sailor on board.

Meanwhile the frigate had carried a fair wind with her to below the latitude of the Western Islands, and was steadily bowling across the Atlantic, with every hope of making an excellent passage. Day and night a sharp look-out was kept from the fore-topmast-head for a strange sail, but each morning showed the line of the horizon unbroken. As the bearer of despatches, Captain Douglas was not allowed to deviate

from his course in chase of an enemy, but from what I know of him, he would have managed to forget this order if the occasion had arisen. With splendid breezes we pushed across the Atlantic until within two days' sail of the Windward Islands, when, at daybreak, the man at the masthead reported nine sail on the weather beam, the nearest, a line-of-battle ship, being distant from us less than seven miles.

We ran up British colours, and immediately from the peak of the stranger fluttered the tricolour—the *Vigilant* had dropped unawares into the heart of a powerful French squadron!





CHAPTER XII.

CHASED.

AT the same moment that we sighted them, the French squadron must have become aware of the stranger that had dropped into their midst, for we immediately observed a great fluttering of bunting, hands hurrying aloft to shake out the night reefs in the topsails, and other signs of unwonted animation, which in ten minutes ended by all nine ships bearing down upon the little *Vigilant* with every stitch of canvas that was likely to hasten their way.

Even to my inexperienced eye it was evident that we had run into a position of extreme jeopardy, and I wondered greatly what the captain would do, for this was the sort of occasion to show the metal of which he was made. Although no orders had been given, every man in the ship's company was on deck, and I felt

greatly reassured on hearing the jokes the crew cracked between themselves, and the easy unconcern with which they viewed the chances of a lengthened captivity in a French prison.

“If them other eight clumbungies weren’t ready to help, the skipper would tell us to take *she*,” observed the old captain of the forecastle, jerking his thumb in the direction of the nearest line-of-battle ship.

Such an attempt would have been about equal to a toy terrier attacking a Westphalian boarhound, but there was no intentional boasting in the old sailor’s remark. He believed what he said, and so did his shipmates, for, if the honest truth must be told, the English thoroughly despised their foes when afloat. From one end of the globe to the other we had been accustomed to kick the French about whenever they showed their noses at sea, and the constant success we met with made us perhaps unduly arrogant. Half the ships flying the British ensign had been built in French dockyards; they constructed most beautiful models;—vessels that sailed two knots to our one—and we took them the moment they went to sea, and employed them against their original masters. It was a by-word and a joke throughout the Service and the country. Even the very frigate I then

belonged to had been built in a French dock-yard, and this remark warns me that I must give you some idea of the *Vigilant's* strength.

This ship had originally been the French twenty-four-gun corvette *Vérité*, but mounted, when captured by the *Undaunted* frigate in 1796, thirty-two guns. On being added to the British Navy, under the name of the *Vigilant*, she was converted into a twenty-eight-gun frigate, armed with twenty-four thirty-two-pounder carronades on her main-deck, and eight eighteen-pounder carronades, with four long sixes, on the quarter-deck and forecastle, giving a total of thirty-six guns of all calibres. The crew supplied to work this mixed armament was wholly inadequate to the task, consisting of only 197 officers, men, and boys, all told. The unexpected arrival of Paul and myself increased the number by two, and if Rurick be counted—and he could fight a Frenchman—we numbered exactly two hundred on board the frigate.

But the *Vigilant* had another peculiarity of which I must make mention. Although only rated as a twenty-eight-gun frigate, she had been fitted, by Captain Douglas's special request, with the lofty mainmast of a thirty-six-gun ship, whilst the fore and mizzen-masts were of the dimensions usually supplied to vessels of her

size and tonnage—she was 579 tons. This was thought a nonsensical whim on her captain's part, which would give much harder work to the men, and probably cripple the frigate's sailing ; but the commander was one of the finest seamen in His Majesty's Service, a man who had made the scientific part of his profession a deep study, and no sooner had the *Vigilant* put to sea than she showed what a marked improvement had been effected by Captain Douglas's sagacity. In the former days, whilst still the *Vérité*, she had been noted as a swift sailer, now her speed was increased to such an extent that she possessed the reputation of being able to show her heels to any vessel afloat, whether British or French. I did not know this at the time, otherwise I should not have wondered so much at the coolness with which the men treated the dangerous position into which the chances of fortune had led us.

It was my morning watch, and the men were washing the upper deck down when the hostile force was sighted. We were running to the westward, bound for Barbadoes, with the wind a trifle before the port-beam—or about south and by west—and the coils of running gear were stopped up so as to be out of the way of the water. When the enemy were reported in sight

the men in their eagerness dropped both scrubbing-brushes and swabs to hasten forward for the purpose of getting a better view of the Frenchmen. Their absence was quite unnoticed by the officer of the watch, who had been below to report our position, but the moment the captain placed his foot on the quarter-deck he observed the abandoned cleaning gear, and at once tackled the lieutenant in charge.

"Where are the watch, Mr. Blomfield? Why are they not finishing their work?"

The officer reddened and muttered something about 'excitement,' but the skipper put a stopper on all excuses in an instant.

"You will understand," he said, "that I permit no such thing as excitement on board this ship, neither would I allow it to serve as an excuse for neglect of duty if every ship in the French Navy lay within a mile of us. Call the men aft immediately, sir, and let them continue washing-down."

The reprimanded lieutenant bit his lip, looking very downcast at this severe wiggling, but you may be quite sure that he lost no time in summoning the watch, and the brushes were soon going as energetically as ever. Meanwhile Captain Douglas was standing on the conning-stool, and leisurely surveying the advancing

enemy through his glass. Most of the other officers, idlers and all, had by this time assembled on the quarter-deck, and I saw them glance uneasily at their commander as he leant lazily over the netting, humming a tune in a low voice, and beating time softly on the woodwork. Not a single order had he issued; indeed, from all appearances, the French squadron might have been cruising off Madagascar for all that Captain Douglas cared about the matter; not an additional sail had been set, and by not a point had the course been altered. No wonder the fat purser turned pale as he glanced from the fast-approaching French line-of-battle ship to his dare-devil skipper, and finally dived below—probably to conceal money about his person—muttering, “He’s mad! mad as Tom of Bedlam!”

For a good half-hour this state of inaction continued, by which time the decks had been swabbed dry and the warm tropical breeze had licked up all traces of their recent wetting. The ropes had been coiled down free for running, and the men were lingering about waiting for the next order, when the skipper at length turned round and broke silence.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” he said, lifting his hat very courteously to the assembled group

of officers, but utterly ignoring the anxiety that was manifest on some of their faces, "you take the air betimes this fine day. You were talking about showing me a sugar plantation at Bridgetown, doctor, but I am afraid we shall not see the snug little island of Barbadoes quite as soon as we hoped, for there are some fellows on the beam there who seem jealous of our getting among the fresh milk and vegetables of Carlisle Bay. How are your patients? No fresh hands on the sick list, I hope, for we may want every man who can pull his pound presently. What's that, Sterne?" as a puff of white smoke was seen to issue from the bridle port of the nearest Frenchman. "A shot? Well, the Crapauds are in an unusual hurry to begin playing at long-balls, and I only wish we were at liberty to indulge them, but it can't be just at present, I am afraid. Keep her away to north-west, Mr. Sterne, and turn the hands up to make all possible sail. The wind will be on the port quarter, which is the frigate's best point of sailing. Put the port studding-sails on her, and rig the fire-engine so that the hose may play on the canvas; then let the men have their breakfasts. Come, master, suppose you and I go to my cabin for a look at the chart. I am sorry for any disappointment that those rascals may have

caused you, gentlemen," and with a sweep of his hand he indicated the pursuing squadron ; " but I hope that you will agree that no blame attaches itself to *me* if our destination is compulsorily altered," and with another polite bow Captain Douglas sauntered slowly down the companion-ladder, closely followed by old Squire, the master.

" Curious humour the skipper's in this morning," remarked the doctor ; " I never saw him so polite and so sarcastic before."

" Then you have never seen him in time of danger, doctor," said the captain's clerk. " I have served with him now in three different ships, and have always noticed that the greater the strait becomes in which he finds himself the more his courtesy increases, for he enjoys it—yes, positively revels in it. He was commander of the *Venerable* at Camperdown, and happened to be aloft when the mizzen-mast went over the side. By some marvellous stroke of luck he was unhurt, and when I went in the dingy to pick him up he managed to stand on the floating spar, to bow, and to express his gratitude in the most courteous language before he stepped into the boat. Yes, he's a rum beggar when his monkey's up," concluded the clerk, dropping into homely vernacular at the end of his anecdote.

This conversation took place after the change

of course ordered by Captain Douglas had been effected. The frigate was now heading north-west, with every stitch of canvas spread that would aid her course through the water, and grandly she foamed along as the freshening breeze bellied out the sails, which were rendered swollen and wind-tight by the water from the fire-engine. Such was her speed that you could feel the very timbers quiver under your feet, and on laying a hand upon one of the topmast backstays you could feel it vibrate like a harp-string. There was something inexpressibly exhilarating in this rapid motion, even though we were flying from an overpowering force ; how fierce and all-absorbing would have been the rapture had we been the pursuers instead of the pursued !

Our change of course had brought the nearest Frenchman—the line-of-battle ship—right astern, and when sail had been made and the frigate had fairly started on her flight, we looked to drop our foe rapidly, for we knew of no ship afloat that could touch the *Vigilant* with a fresh breeze and running free. But as hour after hour passed by it became evident that a real clipper held us in chase, for not only did we fail to place a greater distance between the liner and ourselves, but it became painfully evident that she was slowly but surely overhauling us. By noon

the whole of the French squadron were hull down, and a couple of hours later even their upper sails had sunk beneath the horizon. Most probably they abandoned the chase, leaving us to be accounted for by the grim two-decker which hung abaft our taffrail with the pertinacity of a sleuth-hound, and slowly gained ground despite every dodge that we adopted to increase the frigate's speed.

I must here tell you youngsters that, according to the received rules of naval warfare, a frigate is never supposed to be a match for a line-of-battle ship, and the commander of the smaller vessel would be held fully exonerated by a court-martial if he struck his colours to so powerful an antagonist without firing a shot in self-defence. The relative forces of the two ships are so disproportionate, that resistance on the part of the weaker would be deemed culpable, since it must end in defeat, and the loss of valuable lives which might hereafter be of service to their king and country.

Such was the received rule in maritime warfare, but it by no means follows that it was acted up to by the tough old sea-dogs of those days. For instance, the British frigate *Leander*, which was carrying home the news of our victory at the Nile, was intercepted by the French line-

of-battle ship *Généreux*, carrying seventy-four guns, and having a crew of nine hundred and thirty-six men, whilst the English vessel's whole complement only amounted to two hundred and eighty-two men. Finding escape impossible, the frigate fought her huge antagonist for six hours, and only struck after every stick had been knocked out of her, and she was an ungovernable hulk, her decks strewed fore and aft with the dead and dying. How great was the bull-dog courage displayed by this handful of men may be estimated when I tell you that they killed more than one hundred of the Frenchmen and wounded one hundred and eighty-eight more—being a total greater than the entire crew of the *Leander*! So effectually did the latter defend herself, that when she struck the *Généreux* had not a single boat that would float, and the prize had to be taken possession of by a couple of officers swimming from the victorious ship.

I mention this to show you that they were not over strict in those days about the observance of orders which involved the loss of prestige, though not of honour, and certainly the captain of the *Vigilant* was the last man afloat to see his frigate fall into the hands of an enemy, however superior, without striking a blow—and a pretty sharp one—in self-defence.

By sunset the *Indomptable*—for this we afterwards ascertained was the name of our pursuer—had approached within three miles of us, but most fortunately the breeze then fell lighter, and continued so until the following morning, a circumstance which favoured the frigate more than her heavy antagonist, and enabled the former to increase her distance to nearly five miles. But with the appearance of the sun on the following day the wind again freshened, and the *Indomptable* once more reduced the distance to three miles, only, however, to lose it in the night owing to the same cause.

For three days and nights this long stern chase continued, during which time both ships had travelled over a large extent of ground, and the morning of the fourth day found us running outside the banks and low-lying sandy cays that extend southward from the Bahama group, the *Indomptable* being then within two miles and a half of us, and likely to close within gunshot before many hours were over.

The old saw that ‘familiarity breeds contempt’ is as true as it is curt, and by this time we had become so accustomed to see our enemy’s lofty spars and snowy canvas towering in our wake, that we now observed her movements rather with curiosity than with fear. The

men were tired of this running-away game, and there had been some outbursts of discontent because the skipper did not heave-to and have it out broadside to broadside with the foe. Needless to say, that such a course would have sent us to the bottom before ten minutes, since the *Indomptable* was an eighty-gun ship, and that the captain knew his business better than any one else could teach it to him; however, some excitement was created when all hands were piped aft on the morning of the fourth day, and the skipper, standing on the conning-stool, made the men a little speech.

I must tell you, that never since the frigate left the Downs had Captain Douglas been so polite, so considerate, so cutting of speech and so bubbling over with good-humour as during the weary days that the pertinacious liner hovered about our stern. Every evening he had half-a-dozen of the officers to dinner, when the best that his steward could produce, and the most delicate wines, graced the board. Always a most agreeable host, and possessed of remarkable conversational powers, he outshone himself on these occasions, and the nearer the *Indomptable* drew to our taffrail the higher rose his spirits, and the more irrepressible became his gaiety.

Another thing noticeable about him was, that although he passed the bottle freely enough, and pressed his officers to help themselves,—it was a drinking age,—yet he never allowed his own glass to be filled more than once. However high his spirits rose, no one could say that Dutch courage had any share in their elevation, for he was one of those extraordinary men to whom responsibility seems to act as a tonic, and the presence of danger to impart a spontaneous hilarity that hardly knew in which direction to look for a vent.

“Now, my lads,” he said, when the men had gathered aft and were standing bare-headed to hear his address,—“now, my lads, I’m tired of seeing that old French bruise-water hanging about our wake, and I dare say you are too, so I am going to get rid of her, but I shall want your help to enable me to go through with it. In half-an-hour’s time we shall be abreast of the Mouchoir Carré Channel, and it is my intention to bring the frigate to the wind and thrash her through it. I shall carry on like this, so as to raise no suspicion, until the last moment, then we must whip the studding-sails off her, take in the upper sails, and put her at it on the port tack. This will bring us within range of her broadside, which we must only hope will not

knock any of our sticks away. Perhaps if you handle the long sixes—the carronades won't reach her—steadily we may bring down some of her top hamper and clip her wings a bit. Now to your stations, and show me how smart you can be."

There was one ringing cheer as the sail-trimmers sprang to the braces and studding-sail down-hauls, and the topmen gathered round the lower rungs of the Jacob's ladders ready to spring aloft. Then there was a deadly silence until the orders issued, sharp, short, and incisive, from the captain's lips; the lower studding-sail rose like a balloon under the tripping-line; the upper kites came beautifully to the deck and tops, the master spilling them with the helm; the yards were braced sharp up; and in less than three minutes the frigate was close to the wind, with an extra half fathom to each tack, and every bowline hauled taut as a harp-string.

Quick and seamanlike as the manœuvre had been, the Frenchman was little behind us, though she held her own course for a few minutes so as to bring her within easy gunshot when we passed her on the opposite tack.



CHAPTER XIII.

RURICK ON WATCH.

NOW, if ever, was seen the advantage of the fashion in which Captain Douglas had caused the *Vigilant* to be rigged. The water being comparatively smooth, the huge mainsail drove her along with irresistible velocity, whilst the frigate jerked short and sharp as the seas broke against her weather-bow, like a tightly-curbed steed curvetting under the hands of a skilful rider. The captain conned her himself, his eyes fixed on the weather-leach of the maintopsail, and giving his orders to the two quartermasters at the helm, either by word of mouth or by a gentle motion of the hand. A smile of triumph seemed ever playing about his face ; but keenly as he enjoyed the situation, he never for a moment relaxed from his vigilance, not even taking his eyes off the sails to glance at the

pertinacious enemy who was following on our lee quarter swift as a racer and relentless as fate.

The uniforms—such as they were—ordered by my cousin for little Paul and me, and knocked together by the not too skilful hands of the ship's tailor, had been finished, and donned by us a week or ten days before, and we had then been deemed presentable enough to have stations allotted to us in time of action. I was on the quarter-deck, nominally as attached to the guns in that part, but in reality more as a light-heeled aide-de-camp or messenger, by whom the commander could transmit any order, or issue any direction, that the noise and confusion prevented him from doing by word of mouth. This was a position of considerable trust for one so young, and I felt not only exceedingly proud to have been selected, but, moreover, fully resolved to justify the reliance which had been placed in me. Little Paul was on the forecastle, and I could see him leaning against the head grating and endeavouring to escape the too demonstrative affection of Rurick, who showed his love by slobbering to an extent which was very damaging to the boy's new uniform. In both main-chains petty officers were heaving the lead and calling the soundings in clear incisive tones, instead of employing the

long drawling and harmonious song that befits a known channel and deep water. The master stood beside the captain, listening to the leads-men, and every now and then stepping to the capstan head to consult the chart spread there. His face was grave, but nothing more; perhaps it was only the contrast with Captain Douglas's beaming visage which made one notice it. The ship's company were all on deck ready for going about, and the officers at their respective stations for that manœuvre; the men were laughing and joking in undertones, and altogether nobody seemed much disturbed by the knowledge that an eighty-gun ship would pour her broadside into the *Vigilant* before half-an-hour was over.

Each heave of the lead now showed that we were rapidly approaching the western bank of the channel, a fact which was pretty apparent also by the discolouration of the water.

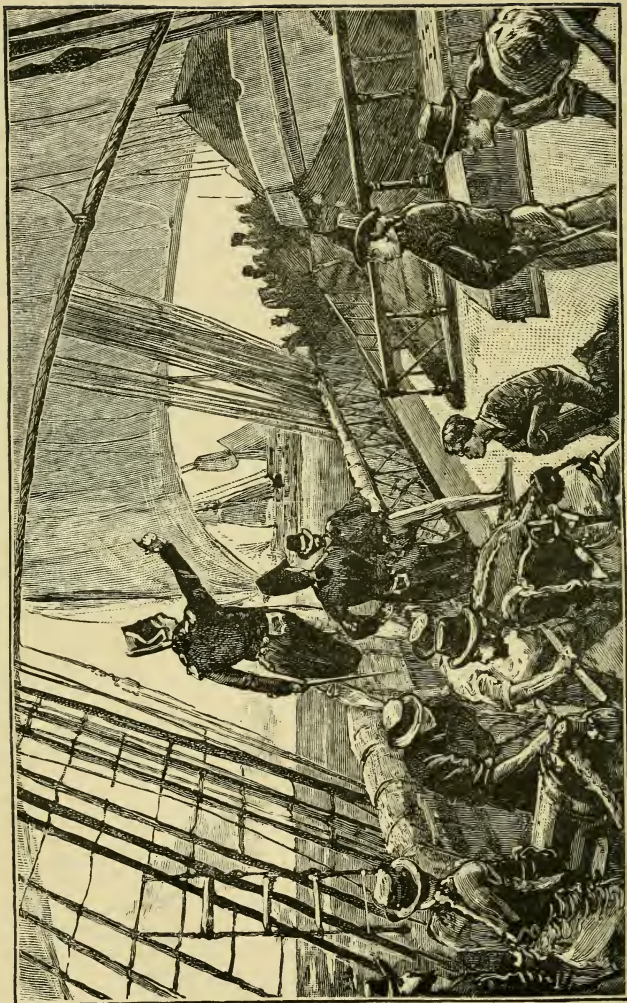
"Mark ten," cried the man in the starboard chains. "Deep nine," chorused back the port leads-man, to be answered almost immediately by "Mark seven."

"We must go about, sir, directly it shoals to five fathoms," said the master, touching his cap, after a final consultation of the chart. "The banks hereabouts are shifting and uncertain."

“Very good, Squire. Mr. Sterne, get all ready for tacking; I shall work the ship myself. No higher, quartermaster; keep her clean full for stays. Steady, Dice.”

Thus eased, the frigate literally tore through the water, and in less than five minutes the port leads-man cried, “Mark five.” Then the helm was put gently down, the head-sheets slackened, and the graceful frigate hove her bows to the wind like a jolly-boat. Not if we had been working into Spithead after a four years’ commission, and with pockets full of prize-money, could the whole manœuvre have been more beautifully executed. At precisely the right moment the after-yards made a splendid swing, off fell her head on the starboard tack, the head-yards were hauled, every tack hardened well home, and off the *Vigilant* shot in the new direction, which, as every one could now see, would bring us within a mile and a half of our huge foe.

“Beat to quarters, Mr. Sterne,” cried the captain, as soon as the ropes had been coiled down; “but keep the main-deck carronades fast—unfortunately they are useless at this distance. Cast loose the long sixes, and tell the gunner to lay one of them himself, and to put his best men to the others. Say also that a



"Aim for her spars, Mr. Vent," said the Captain to the gunner.—p. 187.

bag with twenty dollars is waiting for the man who knocks one of that inquisitive rascal's sticks away," and he waved his hand towards the Frenchman, whom we were now nearing with great rapidity.

Though nominally addressed to the first lieutenant, the words were audible to the whole ship's company, and another ringing cheer burst from their throats as each man hurried to his quarters, where, however, all were to be in a state of inaction, except the favoured crews of the long sixes. These wretchedly inefficient popguns had been cast loose, run in, loaded with a heavy cartridge and single shot, run out again, and were now trained to bear as far on the bow as the ports and the lanyards of the lower rigging would allow. Ships were clumsily fitted in those days, and the guns could make only a small sweep ; still we hoped to get three shots from each gun at the enemy as she passed—one on the bow, the second on the beam, and the third on the quarter.

"Aim for her spars, Mr. Vent," said the captain to the gunner, as he stooped down and looked along the sights of one of the guns himself. "Give more elevation, and try to knock away a stick, for such pills as these," and he pointed contemptuously to a score of six-pounder

shot confined by a grummet, "would hardly go through the Frenchman's side. Now look out. Mr. Sterne, pass the word below that the men on the main-deck are to lie down at their quarters. They will stand a better chance then when the splinters fly. Mind your weather-helm, quartermaster. Dice, no higher."

You youngsters will probably wonder how I felt at this critical moment, when a foe of overpowering strength was on the point of pouring in a destructive fire, by which many of my shipmates would lose the number of their mess, and from which it was by no means unlikely that either little Paul or I, or both, might be the sufferers. To say that I was entirely at ease would be an untruth, but it would be equally untrue to say that I would have exchanged my position for all the wealth the world could offer. The excitement was too great to admit of anything in the shape of fear, although there was a certain amount of the nervousness inseparable from youth placed in a strange and dangerous position. Then again there was the example of those around to sustain me. My cousin, the commander, was absolutely jovial, and not a shadow of care was apparent on the faces of any of the crew. The guns of the *Indomptable* might have been loaded with blank

cartridges, instead of iron, for all that the men seemed to care, and he would have been a craven indeed who would have felt inclined to show the white feather with such surroundings. I took a final glance at the forecastle where little Paul was stationed. The boy had his head above the hammock-netting, and was looking coolly enough at the enemy; and I noticed that he held *Rurick* by the collar, probably afraid lest the noise and smoke should render the beast savage.

"Not much funk there," I thought; but my meditations were brought to a close by a report as the captain of our foremost six-pounder launched his missile at the Frenchman, the other three long sixes—we had run them all over to the lee side—following immediately afterwards, but not apparently doing any damage beyond cutting away the jib-halliards, when the sail came fluttering down the stay; but the *Crapauds* were a smart set of fellows, and the damage repaired in a very short time.

"Better luck next time, Mr. Vent," sung out Captain Douglas. "Lay all your guns for her mainmast. She's a good deal bigger than any haystack that I ever saw in old England, and it would puzzle a blind man to miss her altogether."

Again the miserable toy-guns cracked, and a

cheer arose as a cloud of splinters were seen to fly from the enemy's mainmast, and she took the mainsail off her to relieve the wounded spar.

"Look out!" cried the skipper. "Down flat, men, down," and hardly were the words out of his mouth than the whole side of the *Indomptable* burst forth in jets of fleecy smoke, and in another second the iron hail from forty guns was whizzing about our ears.

Crash went the shot in every direction, some ploughing through our sides, and driving before them showers of splinters more dangerous even than the missile itself, others—and luckily the great majority—directed at our rigging, which was torn and mangled, the sails riddled, and many ropes hanging down in bights.

The cheery voice of the captain was the first thing that brought me to my senses. "Slam away again at his mainmast, Mr. Vent," he cried. "Another shot near the old wound will bring the timber about his ears. Send hands aloft to splice the running gear, and let the boatswain report what damage is done. Clear away the wreck of the fore-topgallant mast, Mr. Sterne, and get the new spar off the booms and on end, ready for sending aloft. Here, Powerscourt, run down to Dr. Henderson and ask him to give you the number of the killed and

wounded, and tell the purser to get a cask of rum out of the spirit-room, for I shall splice the main-brace. Steady with your helm, men. Spill the mizzen-topsail, master; she carries three spokes a-weather."

I have now entered enough into detail for you lads to understand what our condition was, and in what a serious plight we now found ourselves. The enemy's broadside of thirty-six pounders had killed five of our poor fellows and wounded fourteen more, whilst several shot had entered near the water-line, through which the sea was pouring until the carpenters could manage to plug them. But it was aloft that our chief damage had taken place. The fore-topmast was so badly cut about that on the other tack it would certainly go over the side, whilst the fore-topgallant mast was clean shot away and hanging down to leeward, sail and all, a mere mass of useless wreckage. The mainmast was struck, but slightly, although three of the lee shrouds were severed, and the sails were so riddled that there was great danger of their splitting in so fresh a breeze as was then blowing.

Altogether the outlook was exceedingly black, and any other man but Captain Douglas would have given up all further effort to save the

frigate in sheer despair. The length of time for which she had already eluded capture was highly creditable to him, as also was this last attempt to escape an enemy as swift as she was powerful. Even could he succeed in getting the *Vigilant* on the other tack, she would have to encounter her huge foe's destructive broadside again, and it was mere waste of valuable life to expose brave men to a fire which they were unable to return, and yet could not evade.

But such an idea as striking his colours never even entered into the head of Captain Douglas, as far as I was ever able to learn. My impression of the man is that he would have run his ship on shore and scuttled or blown her up sooner than see her fall into the hands of an enemy. In any case I can vouch that although the odds were so desperately against us, no shadow of a cloud was discernible on the skipper's face as he beckoned the master to follow him, and descended the companion hatch to his own cabin.

The men were aloft putting things in the best order possible, or reeving new gear, so I found time to pay a flying visit to the forecastle, where I was much rejoiced to find both little Paul and his shaggy pet unhurt. There was a strange exultation in the boy's eyes such as I

had never observed before, and the first remark he made was, "Oh, Frank, is it not grand?"

The old Varangian blood was evidently astir in my young companion, and the quiet, modest, courtly child had discovered that in the thunder of cannon was his true element. Quiet little Paul was born a warrior; with me it was an acquired taste.

Whilst talking under the weather-netting there came a frantic cheering from the men aloft—a loud and prolonged succession of hearty British hurrahs, that were taken up by the men on deck, and re-echoed by the very wounded in the cockpit. Paul and I both jumped on the netting, and there we saw, what?—the big Frenchman with her mainmast over the side!

She had tacked with the intention of galling us with a constant fire, and in her anxiety to do us a mischief, had thought too little of the danger that such a course brought upon herself, for, having tacked, her captain most injudiciously reset his mainsail, with the result that the mainmast and all belonging to it came crashing over the side, carrying with it the mizzen-topmast and topgallant-mast.

"Three cheers for His Majesty the King!" cried Captain Douglas, who had bounded on deck and taken in at a glance the providential

catastrophe which had probably saved us from capture and a French prison. "Call the men down from aloft the moment the wreckage is on deck, Mr. Sterne. We can jog on under easy canvas now until the men have had their grog. Master, we'll anchor inside that sandbank you were showing me, and repair damages there. I don't think the Frenchman will trouble us much before to-morrow morning, even if he does then."

In less than two hours we were snugly at rest under the lee of a large shoal, and were hard at work repairing damages, which was a much less difficult task to accomplish with the ship quietly at anchor than when she was carrying on under a press of canvas.

The Frenchman, we observed, had bagged greatly to leeward since the loss of her mainmast, but she also had anchored at a distance from us of about five miles; and through our glasses we could make out that she was rigging up a jury-mainmast with considerable skill and expedition. Whoever commanded the *Indomptable* was a good sailor and a brave man; we did not know his name then, but were to learn it afterwards.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when we anchored, and by an hour later the

men had finished their dinner and had set to work with a will to remove all traces of the recent conflict. A new fore-topmast was sent aloft, fresh sails bent wherever necessary, the wounded mainmast strengthened by a wooden fish woolded firmly against it, the standing rigging knotted and set up afresh, the shot-holes securely plugged, and last, but not least—for it made a deep impression on both little Paul and myself—the bodies of the five dead seamen, and of Hodgson, the master's mate, who had sunk under his wounds, were committed to the deep, Captain Douglas reading the service over them in impressive, reverent tones, which called the moisture to more eyes than mine. One by one—the officer's first—the bodies were lifted to the gangway, each shrouded in a hammock and decently concealed beneath the flag of his country—the grand old British ensign, under whose shadow they had fought and for whose glory they had died. Dull and sullen sounded the plunge as the rigid forms were shot into their watery grave, and an unusual cast of thought was visible on the brows of the dead men's surviving messmates, but before the funeral service was half-an-hour old the usual recklessness had returned to all, and this painful ceremony was forgotten.

And this is as it should be with men whose business it is to uphold their country's honour by force of arms. Every bullet has its billet, and neither soldier nor sailor has time to waste in extravagant grief for a fate that may be his own to-morrow. Nor is this speedy forgetfulness to be confused with want of feeling or callousness, since there exists no class of men more attached to each other than the members of both Services ; it springs simply from the hazardous profession in which they are engaged, and is as much a necessary part of it as is nesting to a bird or blowing to a grampus.

Far into the night the men worked, and it was two bells in the middle watch before the *Vigilant* was once more all a-taunto, when, an anchor-watch having been set, the tired crew were dismissed to their hammocks, Captain Douglas having determined to remain quietly where he was, to give his men a good 'all night in.' With the morning light the movements of the Frenchman could be seen, and it would also be easier to find the way through the narrow and intricate channel which it still remained for the frigate to navigate.

Both little Paul and myself were due on deck at four o'clock, it being our morning watch, and on this account we had been allowed to retire

quietly to our hammocks at a tolerably early hour. When we met on deck our first impulse was to visit Rurick, who usually took his repose on a thrum-mat, which the captain of the fore-castle, with whom the animal was a special favourite, nightly spread in the manger; a little attention which the bear thoroughly appreciated, since he loved a soft plank as much as the sleepest midshipman in His Majesty's Service.° Down on the main-deck accordingly we went, but there was no sign of Rurick, although we soon heard his flat feet shuffling about the fore-castle, apparently in unwonted excitement.

Climbing the Jacob's ladder which led up the fore-hatchway, we found the animal reared on his hind-legs against the netting, and sniffing to seaward with half-smothered growls and many twitchings of his flexible snout, all of which plainly portrayed that something or other was happening which surely disturbed poor Bruin's peace of mind.

"What in the world can be the matter with him?" I asked Paul, in astonishment. "It's my belief that he smells the Frenchmen," I added, more in jest than really meaning it, but the quiet tone in which my companion replied, "It is mine too," and peered out earnestly into the darkness, took me entirely by surprise.

"Do you see those dark objects there?" continued Paul, eagerly. "Those are what are making Rurick excited."

"They are boats," I whispered back, aghast at the discovery; "I see them moving, and no one on board suspects their presence."

"Go and tell the officer of the watch," replied Paul in the same low tone, but this I steadfastly refused to do. The discovery had been made by the boy and his bear, so it was only fair that to them should belong the credit.

It was no time for wrangling, and Paul hastened to the quarter-deck with the news, when Mr. Blomfield satisfied himself through the captain's night-glass that nine boats, crowded with men, were lying on their oars just beyond the sand-bank, waiting for the first flush of dawn to throw themselves on board us, and carry the frigate before her men could jump out of their hammocks.

It was a bold and excellently-devised scheme, which owed its failure solely to the keen sense of smell possessed by the bear and the sharp eyesight of little Paul. The captain of the *Indomptable* had rightly concluded that we should not weigh until daylight, and also that our fatigued crew would be sleeping the sleep of the weary, and he had struck out this ingenious plan of giving us an unpleasant awakening. As

you have already seen it was within an ace of succeeding, and if the Roman Capitol was saved by the discordant cackling of the sacred geese, no less surely was the *Vigilant* made aware of her perilous position by the whines and uneasiness of the uncouth brute that a month before had scrambled over her gangway in so unceremonious a fashion.

Captain Douglas jumped upright in his swinging cot, with every faculty on the alert, the moment that Mr. Blomfield's voice sounded in his ear. Hastening on deck, a short survey convinced him of the presence of a formidable flotilla, and in the darkness which prevented me from distinguishing his features, I heard the suppressed laugh of exulting glee that broke from his lips.

"Youngster," he said to me, "go down below and wake up every officer singly, but warn each that no lights are to be shown in their cabins. If as much as a lantern is lit, I will try the offender by court-martial and break him like an eggshell. Mr. Blomfield, explain to the quartermaster and anchor-watch the necessity for silence and expedition, then send them down to rouse the men out. Not an order must be given aloud, not the tap of a drum or the sound of a pipe heard. We'll let our ingenious friends

imagine they have caught us napping, and give them a lesson that they will remember to the end of their lives. Remember, silence, and no lights. Let the men take four turns round their hammocks, as at night-quarters, and stow them in the nettings; they will serve as a defence against musketry."

One by one the officers appeared on deck, to receive fresh instructions and cautions from the skipper, and soon the whole interior of the *Vigilant* was like an ant's-nest that had been disturbed—as busy and as silent. From mouth to mouth the news flew like lightning along the lower deck, and the men understood the rod that was pickling for the Frenchmen and stole to their duty like ghosts. To run in the carronades would have caused a commotion that in the quiet of the morning must have reached the ears of our assailants and awakened their suspicions, so the tackles were noiselessly cast loose, and each gun loaded with grape and canister by men who climbed outside the ports for that purpose. Then the boarding-nettings were triced up, and every man looked to his cutlass, pistol, and pike. Little more than half-an-hour had elapsed since the discovery of the boats by Paul, and in that short time the frigate had been changed from the abode of sleeping men to a

formidable fortress bristling with every means of defence known to the maritime warfare of that day.

And we were none too soon, for with each advancing minute the faint light in the east grew brighter and more bright, licking up the veil of darkness that brooded over the ocean and converting it into a dull grey, which was even more perplexing for the eye to penetrate than the blackness of night itself.

Captain Douglas kept an unremitting watch on the flotilla with his night-glass, and I heard him whisper to Mr. Sterne, "They are breaking up into two divisions, so pass the word below to man both sides, depress the guns to their utmost limit, and each man must fire as his gun bears. No cheering, mind—no shouting, until the enemy is alongside, then all hands can yell to their hearts' content. Powerscourt, you will find my fighting sword and pistols on the table in my after-cabin. Go down and bring them to me."

For at least five minutes every ear was on the stretch to catch the sharp click of oars in the rowlocks, but the Frenchmen had taken care to muffle them well, and the flotilla was within two hundred yards of us before its presence was made known by any sound. Then the Frenchmen bent to their work with a will, and in two

divisions the nine boats bore swiftly down upon their prey.

"Boat ahoy!" hailed the sentry by the captain's orders, but no answer was given to the challenge beyond the triumphant cry of "*Vive la République!*" "*À bas les Anglais!*"—these rose from scores of lips as the enemy dashed towards us.

But suddenly from the main-deck there comes a flash, a roar, and a column of smoke; another, another, and yet another follow in rapid succession, and amidst the crashing and rending of timber is heard the hoarse exclamation drawn forth by surprise, or the cry of sudden terror, but both are drowned by the ghastly shrieks of the wounded and dying. There are but six boats left now out of nine; that close discharge has sunk three, and their crews are struggling in the water. God have mercy on them, for the sharks are thick in those seas!

A light gig, with a tall figure wrapped in a boat-cloak, sweeps along, and a deep manly voice is heard encouraging the half panic-stricken Frenchmen.

"On board! on board!" cries the captain of the *Indomptable*, waving his sword in the air as he stands upright and steers straight for the *Vigilant's* quarter. "*En avant! en avant, mes*

braves!”—and even as he speaks the gig’s bow grinds against our side, and the gallant officer has grasped the mizzen-chains and is striving to gain a footing before leaping the netting. He succeeds, and setting one foot on a dead-eye, jumps resolutely inboard, followed closely by his coxswain and three of his gig’s crew.

Captain Douglas, whose eyes seem everywhere, has noted this episode of the fight, and springs down from the conning-stool to engage a foeman who seems worthy of his steel. But before their blades can do more than touch each other, the French commander is felled by a handspike, two of his crew are shot, while his coxswain and the remaining man are taken prisoners.

Shouts of triumph from the British and yells of baffled rage from the French now sound in every direction, as the latter were forced back into their boats, or dropped slashed and bleeding over the side. Many of the boarders were stabbed by pikes through the main-deck ports, and at least twenty men were bodily fisted, disarmed, and sent below as prisoners.

“Run forward to the forecastle, Powerscourt,” cried Captain Douglas, “and tell Mr. Sterne that a heavy launch full of troops is under the port bow, and the fellows will be on board in a minute or two. Hurry away, my lad.”

No need for that recommendation, for quick as my legs will carry me I dart forward, dodging through the crowded and slain-encumbered gangways, where a few brave Frenchmen are still making a desperate but futile resistance. More than one blow is aimed at me as I slip past and reach the forecastle panting and breathless to deliver my message.

"To the port side, marines and blue-jackets," roars the first lieutenant. "Follow me here to repel boarders."

It was not a moment too soon, for the Frenchmen began to tumble over the netting in swarms, and our fellows could hardly hold their own. Little Paul was standing by the head-grating, holding Rurick with one hand, and grasping a cutlass many sizes too large for him with the other. A regular hand-to-hand fight was now in progress, in which I bore little or no part, for the impatient seamen made no scruple in pushing me out of the way to the rear in order that they might close with the enemy themselves. Any random blows I warded off, and I was trying to reach little Paul's side when I saw a Frenchman rush at him with uplifted cutlass. I drew a pistol and snapped at the fellow, but the useless old flint weapon flashed in the pan, and in another minute I expected

to see my companion's sunny curls dabbled in blood, although he stood up manfully and held ready his cumbrous weapon to ward off the blow aimed at his head.

Doubtless the sheer strength of the muscular Gaul would have beaten down the boy's guard, but that blow was destined never to fall. Like a Jack-in-the-box there uprose from the deck a pillar of brown fur, surmounted by a huge head from which twinkled a pair of little eyes, bloodshot and cruel. So abrupt was Rurick's motion that his young master was tumbled down into the scuppers, and the bear's head received the stroke that would infallibly have sent my small friend to a better world.

Received it—but the assailant was not to go unscathed, for all the suppressed fierceness of the animal's nature had been aroused by the smell of blood, the noise, and the furious struggle carried on before him. Little Paul told me afterwards that it was as much as he could do to keep Rurick quiet during the earlier part of the combat, and now that the animal saw his master's life threatened, his fury burst all bounds. With an angry roar the bear shook off the drops of blood that were streaming over his eyes, then, warding off a thrust made by the astonished Frenchman with the dexterity of a

fencing-master, he shuffled quickly forward and his paws closed round the man's body.

I can see it all plainly before me now, though nearly half a century has elapsed since this occurrence happened;—can see the terrified Frenchman's open mouth, protruding eyes, and blackening tongue, and can hear the dull crackling of breast-bone and ribs mingling with the fierce snorts of the infuriated brute. It was an awful sight, and one never to be forgotten, but Rurick saved his young master's life as surely then, as an hour before he had saved the *Vigilant* from capture.

I have entered somewhat into details, but now little more remains to be told. From the quarter and main-decks both seamen and marines poured forward, and the Frenchmen were soon beaten back into their boats, such at least as were not killed or taken prisoners. Well-conceived and vigorous as had been the attack, it ended in the most disastrous defeat for the enemy. Out of nine boats that formed the hostile flotilla but four left the side of the *Vigilant*, whilst only three—and one of these in a sinking condition—ever returned to the *Indomptable*, for our grape and canister played horrible havoc amongst their crowded masses before they escaped beyond range, sending one

fairly to the bottom and committing great carnage amongst the rest.

I feel convinced that only the most imperative sense of the duty that he owed to his king and his country reconciled Captain Douglas to this slaughter, and I am certain that his heart bled for the retreating foe as the hail of grapeshot from our carronades tore through their ranks and ploughed the water around them into foam. The French captain, with the blood still oozing from beneath the handkerchief bound round his head, stood on the stern-grating and watched this awful termination to the enterprise which sixty minutes before had promised to be wholly successful, and I say nothing to the discredit of the Chevalier d'Espinaux when I record that on seeing the destruction of his brave followers the blistering tears poured forth from his haggard eyes, and the deep voice that had cheered them on to the assault became choked in sobs that threatened to burst that gallant heart.

War is an awful pastime, my lads, as you will have learnt before you reach my age. In hot blood and the fierce rapture of strife the actors in the deadly game think little, and reck less, of death and wounds given and received. It is not to them, however great may be their sufferings, that the horrors of war come fully home.

Rather is it with the gentle mothers, the loving wives, the tender sisters, and the affectionate fathers that the true agony lies. Theirs it is to bear the miseries of suspense and nightly to bedew their pillows with their tears, as through the long hours of darkness they count the tardy strokes of the clock, and break the silence by passionate appeals to the Almighty to grant safety to their loved one far away. Many a gentle heart in quiet Brittany or by the sunny Loire was praying for Jacques the husband, Jean the son, or François the lover, what time our grapeshot were quenching the lives of these poor fellows, and the ground-sharks were digging at their bodies with blunted snout. Yes, my lads, the best half of the evil of war falls upon the women. You are young now, and don't believe me, but rest assured that the day will come when you will.





CHAPTER XIV.

AT PORT ROYAL.

IMMEDIATELY the guns were secured Captain Douglas ordered the ship's company to be mustered, when we found that the loss on our side amounted to six men killed and twenty-two wounded, which, when added to the victims of yesterday's action, brought our total to eleven officers and men killed, and thirty-six wounded, causing a gap in our numbers that made the bare working of the heavily-sparred frigate a matter of difficulty. Of prisoners we found ourselves in possession of forty-seven, including the captain of the *Indomptable* and five other officers. At least half of the entire number were wounded, most of them badly; and strewn about our deck were the bodies of twenty-three of the enemy, killed outright in the hand-to-hand tussle.

What must have been the total loss of the attacking party it is difficult to say, but Monsieur d'Espinaux himself put it down as at least one hundred and fifty men from first to last, and he would not be likely to exaggerate on such a subject. The wounded of both nations were tended with equal humanity by our surgeons, and all the dead were buried together after a short and hurried service read by the captain. The French prisoners were then secured below—the officers being on parole—and the men had breakfast, after which the decks were washed down and cleansed from the blood with which they were plentifully bespattered. Little or no damage had been done to the *Vigilant* by the attack, since no guns had been used against her, and when, early in the forenoon watch, she got under weigh, there was little to mark how narrowly she had escaped capture by an overwhelming force.

I felt sure then, and I heard from his own lips afterwards, that Captain Douglas was very much inclined to disregard the fact that he was the bearer of despatches, and as such precluded from forcing an action. He would have dearly liked to attack the *Indomptable*, now crippled by the loss of her mainmast, and her crew both considerably reduced by the numbers lost and

taken prisoners, and also discouraged by a disastrous defeat and the absence of their gallant captain. That the Frenchman still had five hundred men to our one hundred and forty Captain Douglas regarded as unworthy of thought, considering that such numerical odds in the enemy's favour would make the tussle about equal, and what his course would have eventually been I cannot now say, for all doubt was at an end when the liner was seen exchanging signals with a vessel in the offing. Another French ship had hove in sight, so it behoved us to clear out as fast as possible, the *Vigilant's* crew having done their duty in a manner of which any captain had reason to be proud, however keen he might be for personal glory and the honour of his country.

So under all the sail that could be spread with safety the frigate beat through the Mouchoir Carré Channel, and then, the wind shifting to the eastward, got a slant which carried her with a flowing sheet between the east end of Cuba and the island of San Domingo, and so eventually to Port Royal in Jamaica, where we dropped anchor four days after we had beaten off the boats of the *Indomptable*.

I must here mention that little Paul, under the direction of the assistant-surgeon, sewed up

the wound in Rurick's head, a task which no one else seemed inclined to undertake, notwithstanding the enhanced affection felt for the animal by the ship's company. He progressed apace, but it was absolutely necessary to keep him tied up during the whole time that the French prisoners were on board. These men, at the request of the Chevalier d'Espinaux, had been released from the sweltering heat of the fore-hold, and had assisted to work the frigate under two of their own unwounded officers. I have always thought that one of these fellows must have played Rurick some spiteful trick on the sly; in any case, when the Frenchmen were first released and assembled on the fore-castle amongst our men, who treated them like brothers, the bear made a charge amongst them, and one less agile than his fellows only escaped at the cost of a patch of good cloth clawed from his trousers. Our fellows roared to see the way the 'Johnnies' skipped up the Jacob's ladder into the rigging, dropping the pipes with which they had been presented on the deck in their dire confusion; but none the less was the brute a source of constant dread to these men, and his confinement was absolutely imperative. You will probably ask how it came about that he knew the French from the English blue-jackets,

seeing that both were dressed as nearly as possible alike. This very natural demand I am not learned enough in ursine manners to answer or explain, although I have a theory of my own on the subject which entirely satisfies *me*.

It is, and always will be, my firm impression that Rurick *smelt* them.

At Port Royal Captain Douglas was highly gratified to find Sir Pelt Barker, the Commander-in-Chief on the North American and West Indian station. When the wounded men were taken ashore to the hospital the whole fleet manned the rigging, and each ship cheered the boats as they passed. It was a sight worth remembering to see the blood rush up into the faces of the poor fellows at this tribute to their courage, and to watch them wave their weak pale hands in return for the friendly greeting. Alas! many of them were destined only to leave the hospital for the palisades, for the terrible heat of August made even slight wounds difficult to heal.

The French prisoners were sent ashore,—the Chevalier d'Espinaux being the guest of Sir Pelt,—and then Rurick was allowed his full liberty again. Captain Douglas had told the admiral of the strange fashion in which he had picked up a young cousin, a live prince, and a Russian

bear in the English Channel, and had also explained the important services rendered by the two latter in discovering the night attack and enabling him to frustrate it. The consequence of this was, that we were all three politely asked to dinner at the great man's house, that is to say, that Paul and I received invitations, and the former was requested to bring his pet.

I need hardly tell you lads that the very first thing that both Paul and I did after our dropping anchor was to write to my father, explaining every circumstance that had befallen us from the hour that we went adrift up to the present time. Captain Douglas had done the same, so nothing remained for us but to keep quiet until a reply could be received, which would not be under three months at the shortest; whilst the chances were far from remote that the vessel bearing the letters would be captured, and that they would never reach their destination at all. To obviate this we sent duplicates by the next packet, and then our minds were at rest on that score. Captain Douglas had also, with great liberality, taken us both to the best outfitter in Kingston, and procured us kits from which nothing useful or necessary was omitted. We were therefore in all the glory of brand-new uniform when we went ashore to dine with the

admiral, and Rurick was resplendent with a bright silver collar which had been subscribed for and purchased by the officers and crew of the *Vigilant*, the latter of whom regarded the animal as their own property, and had caused the name of the frigate to be engraved on the band.

From the landing-place to the admiral's house was some little distance, and this we intended walking, but we little guessed the task that lay before us. The story of ourselves and Rurick, more particularly of the way in which the latter had squeezed the life out of the Frenchman, had spread from the frigate to the fleet, and from the fleet to the shore, so that half the darkies in Port Royal thronged the wharf to see us land, and get a peep at the redoubtable animal of which they had heard so much. Immediately we stepped on shore the sable crowd closed round us, and the shrill voices of the women rose to the highest pitch of wonder and delight as the enormous brute scrambled up the steps and took up his position alongside of little Paul.

"Look at lilly buckra massa with the guinea gold head," cried a pretty negress, grinning from ear to ear.

"You like to have the combing of that wool, eh, Dinah?" retorted a young mulatto, who was

evidently the comic man of the port, for the whole crowd burst into uproarious laughter at the discomfiture of the poor girl, who grew of an ashen grey colour with anger as she answered—

“You nothing but rude black man,”—she was the colour of a well-polished stove herself,—“and you take liberties with a lady. ’Larity breeds despise, Mr. Pompey, sar!” and having by her eloquence silenced the wag, Dinah threw her broad nostrils aloft, and once more grinned admiringly at Paul, whilst the fickle and light-hearted negroes now laughed as heartily at the discomfited Pompey as, a few seconds before, they had laughed with him.

But to poor shy little Paul this public ovation and the unblushing attentions of the lovely Dinah were inexpressibly painful, and the lad hung his head in pure vexation as the crowd closed more nearly around, and some of the boldest ventured to stroke the bear.

“Make Rurick clear us a passage,” I whispered ; whereupon Paul said something in Russian, and immediately the animal reared himself on his hind-legs and gave forth a growl that caused the startled darkies to scatter in every direction as he shuffled rapidly towards them.

I have seen more than one panic in my time,

but none so complete, so harmless, and so laughable as this. The negroes nearest to Rurick—I grieve to say that pretty Dinah was amongst the number—were knocked down by the suddenness of the bear's movements, and lay in terror where they fell, each one yelling as only a frightened nigger can yell. The others fled in every direction—broke—vanished! and in less time than it takes me to write it we were alone and unmolested, for the prostrate victims had regained their feet and were following their companions, each looking back to see whether the ferocious monster was on his or her track.

Paul often led Rurick through the streets of Port Royal after that, but the black population always gave him and his charge a remarkably wide berth.

"What did you say to him?" I asked as we continued our walk. "I never saw the old chap look so ferocious before, and yet he was in an excellent temper."

"It is only a trick that Irmac taught him," replied the boy with a sigh. "When we passed through a Siberian village where the inhabitants were stingy this dodge was sure to draw money or food. Irmac could pick out the most avaricious man in the crowd by instinct, and at a word from him Rurick would feign fury and

rush upon the delinquent, to the intense delight of the remainder, most of whom were probably in the fellow's debt and bore him no good-will."

I pass over the dinner without comment, merely mentioning that I did not open my lips twice during the long tedious business; whilst little Paul patronized, questioned, nay, even disagreed with Sir Pelt, and made himself as thoroughly at home under the great man's mahogany as he would have been in our cottage at Old Shoreham. How the boy could be so perfectly unembarrassed amongst people old enough to be his grandfather I could never understand.

Meanwhile the repairing of the *Vigilant* was making great progress under the hands of the dockyard authorities; the shot-holes were filled in, the damaged rigging replaced, and all traces of the conflict removed. Some of the wounded had returned to their duty; the remainder were invalided to England, and either sent to Greenwich Hospital, or discharged from the Service. Volunteers from a homeward-bound corvette—a smart frigate under a fighting captain never lacks hands—had filled up our complement, and we were all looking forward to a cruise in which prize-money was to be picked up, for we had been six weeks at Port Royal, when

an armed schooner entered the harbour, and within an hour Captain Douglas was signalled to attend at the admiral's office, whilst the frigate was ordered to take in wood and water, and prepare for sea immediately.

I have now the painful task of relating an event which had taken place some two years before our rescue by the *Vigilant*. This was a mutiny on board one of His Majesty's ships, and one, moreover, so determined in its character and so atrocious in its details that a shudder ran through the entire land when the news reached England, and the navy knew that a blot had been flung on the fair field of its escutcheon which it would take many gallant deeds to wipe out. Were it not absolutely necessary to the development of my story, I should make no mention of this miserable business, but circumstances about to be related will show that there is no means by which I could work round what to me must always be a painful subject, holding, as I do, the honour of our glorious Service close to my heart.

Whilst cruising off the west end of Porto Rico, the crew of the thirty-two-gun frigate *Antigone* broke out into open mutiny, a catastrophe of which, happily, we have not many instances in the British Navy. Only those who

have been to sea know the long-suffering and the forgiving spirit of poor Jack, or what arbitrary treatment and cruelty he will bear without a murmur, provided only that his oppressor is a brave man and a good seaman. An officer possessing these latter qualities could do pretty much what he liked in the old war time, and his crew would never turn. Injustice, irritating work, and the cruel lash were all forgotten when he took them alongside an enemy's ship and called upon them to follow him ; in fact, I have no hesitation in saying, that an officer who could drive his men to mutiny must have been endowed by the devil with powers of persecution fortunately confined to a very few. Now-a-days such despicable tyrants would be known to the nation and shelved ; but in 'eighteen hundred and war-time' journalism was in its infancy, and there was no tribunal of public opinion before which such men could be haled. A captain was practically absolute, and it lay with him to make his ship a happy one, or the dreary abode of unspeakable wretchedness.

In saying the above, you will not understand me as palliating insubordination in however light a form, but merely as expressing my firm conviction that poor Jack will never rise in rebellion unless there is something terribly

wrong with those above him—men whose duty it is, remember, not only to drill their crew into a state of efficiency, but also to look to their comfort and happiness. No man on earth or sea reads character with more shrewdness and accuracy than Jack, and an ounce of consideration or kindness shown him will cause his soft heart to forget a ton of faults.

Now without the slightest wish to bring obloquy on the officers of the *Antigone*, yet it is certain that they were as harsh a set of men as were ever thrown together; while the commander, Captain ——, had perhaps the worst character for brutality and cruelty of any officer in the Service.

Given a cruel skipper, with officers of the same class, and it becomes easy to guess what kind of lives the unhappy crew will lead. Harassing and unnecessary work, harshly ordered and doggedly executed, a total absence of alacrity and cheerfulness, with the gratings rigged every morning, such is the spectacle that a vessel thus situated presents, and no more sad condition is attainable in the lot of man.

I shall not distress you boys by any details of the cruelties that took place on board the miserable frigate by which the men were turned to demons, and only awaited an opportunity for

wreaking vengeance on their oppressors. One more straw was requisite to break the back of their stolid endurance, and this burden was laid upon them the day before the outbreak.

At sunset the men were sent aloft to reef topsails, a manœuvre which in a smart frigate should take less than two minutes from first to last. On this occasion Captain —— was barbarous enough to declare that he would flog the last hand off the mizzen-topsail yard, and the men knew that on that subject he would keep his word to the letter.

Reflect a moment on what such a threat conveys. However smartly the sail was reefed some one *must* be last, and therefore some one *must* be punished. Now the men at the earings are always the best seamen and most active top-men in the ship, and as their station takes them out beyond the lifts they are necessarily the last to get clear of the yard. Captain ——'s speech conveyed no encouragement, for it meant, in other words, that he would flog the smartest hand in the top. Think of the injustice! Ponder over the innate brutality that could have thought out and given utterance to such a cowardly threat!

And now comes the sequel. Two of the finest young fellows on board the frigate had gone

to the earrings, and seeing that they would be last when their topmates laid in, they sprang from the foot-ropes in a desperate attempt to clutch the topmast rigging. Both missed their hold; both turned over and over in the air; both lay motionless on the deck—senseless—bleeding—dead!

Did Captain —— express any sorrow at this sad accident, you will ask? Did he reproach himself for being the cause of this fatal catastrophe?

Not a word of sympathy, not a thought of regret.

“Pick those lubbers up and throw them over-board,” was his order as he walked coolly below to his wine, after severely reprimanding and threatening with further punishment the unhappy mizzen-topmen, whose duties brought them more particularly under the observation of this maritime Nero.

Grievous wrongs and severe punishments had been borne by the crew of the *Antigone*, but this last insult to the shattered corpses of their ill-fated shipmates caused the fire of discontent which had long been smouldering to burst into the fierce flame of mutiny. That evening witnessed groups whispering on the forecastle with lowering brows, and a stubborn obstinacy was

visible in the demeanour of the crew throughout the following day. When the unfortunate top-men were buried—for Captain ——’s brutal order was not carried out—and that part of the service was reached in which it says, “We commit the bodies of our brothers to the deep,” a voice called aloud, “You murdered them,” and the utterer of those words was never discovered, although the captain threatened to flog the whole ship’s company.

Any man, or set of men, endowed with ordinary intelligence and humanity—and we cannot suppose the *Antigone* officers to have been *all* bad—would have seen the earth cracking beneath their feet, and affording glimpses of the molten lava of human passion that was so soon to overflow the surface. All were blind on this occasion, relying on the terrors inspired by the lash and the bonds of discipline. Unquestionably the most besotted in his pride of position, and in a cruel contempt for his miserable inferiors, was Captain ——; but the hour of reckoning was close at hand, when the tyrant would be called upon to plead in justification at a higher bar than earth can show.

After quarters in the evening, when the topsails had again been reefed amidst execrations,

foul language, and threats, the mutiny broke out. Gathering on the fore-castle and in both waists, the exasperated crew broke into loud murmurs, and, as is the fashion among seamen in the early stages of insubordination, began rolling double-headed shot about the deck, directing these missiles at the legs of the officers on the quarter-deck.

Even now there seems every reason to believe that order could have been restored by a few kindly words and trivial concessions on the part of Captain ——, but that officer went below for his pistols, whilst the first lieutenant, who had advanced towards the men, thinking to drive them below by his mere presence, received a blow from a tomahawk which severely wounded him in the arm.

All hope of quelling the rising was now at an end; a blow had been struck and blood had flowed, acts for which the Articles of War enjoined severe penalties, which would be scrupulously exacted. The mutineers had placed a rope round their own necks, and the bloody work must be completed. Let us, amidst our abhorrence, find space for some slight sentiment of pity when we think of these miserable men, goaded to despair and mutiny by tyranny, and pushed onward in their foul acts

by the very rigour of the law which they outraged.

Another blow from the same weapon and the first lieutenant fell ; in a moment his throat was cut and the body thrown overboard ; then, with all their pent-up passions loosed, the men rushed aft, and there followed a carnival of crime, torture, and ruthless butchery into which it were shame to enter, for it is a foul blot on our national record. It will be sufficient to say that only two officers were left alive for the purpose of navigating the frigate—the master and a midshipman. The captain tried to gain the deck, but was driven back by repeated wounds, and finally forced overboard through a stern window in his cabin. All three lieutenants, the surgeon, purser, midshipmen, lieutenant of marines, the captain's clerk, and the boatswain shared their commander's fate, though it is much to be feared that fiendish malice caused their sufferings to be greatly prolonged. Then, the unholy revel at an end, and the blood-stained ship theirs beyond dispute, the leading mutineers could take counsel and decide on the future.

The resolution come to was traitorous, and an additional stain on even ruthless murderers : it was to carry the frigate to La Guayra, a port in

the Spanish Main, and deliver her up to their country's enemies.

With blows and constant threats of death the master and midshipman were compelled to obey the behests of their tyrants, and to work the ship to the desired haven, where the mutineers surrendered her to the Spanish Governor, making no concealment of their rebellion, beyond asserting that all the officers' lives had been spared, and that they had been turned adrift in a boat well stored with water and provisions.

It can hardly be credited that the Governor believed this tale, but at all events he affected to ; and notwithstanding the remonstrances and explanations addressed to him by the British Commander-in-Chief on the Leeward Island station, he refused to give up his ill-gotten prize, but proceeded to fit the *Antigone* for sea as a Spanish national frigate.

As I remarked before, my boys, very small fry in the shape of ships or prisoners captured at sea were dearly welcome to our enemies in eighteen hundred and war-time.

Now the armed schooner that had just anchored at Port Royal brought intelligence that the *Antigone* had recently arrived at Puerto Cabello from Aux-Cayes in the island of San Domingo, and was to continue her voyage to

Havana, passing through the channel which separates the island of Oruba and Cape San Roman. The recapture of this frigate, so disgracefully lost to His Majesty, was earnestly longed for by the whole British Navy, and the accomplishment of the task was committed to Captain Douglas and the crew of the *Vigilant*. Hence the signals from the admiral's office, and our immediate preparations for sea.

By six bells in the afternoon watch we were under weigh and standing to the eastward.

Before closing this chapter I ought to say, that, on hearing the nature of the service before him, Captain Douglas had proposed to Sir Pelt Barker that the *Antigone* should be cut out from under the fortifications of the port in which she had taken refuge, and had undertaken all responsibility if supplied with a barge and twenty men from the flag-ship. This, he pointed out, would save weeks of cruising; but the admiral refused his consent, considering the service too desperate, and unlikely to end in anything but defeat.





CHAPTER XV.

CUTTING OUT THE 'ANTIGONE.'

ON leaving Port Royal Captain Douglas had received sealed orders, which were not to be opened until the *Vigilant* arrived off the east end of Jamaica. On reaching this spot he found directions to proceed to the point of land which, stretching out into the Caribbean Sea, forms the western boundary of the Gulf of Maracaybo—any map will show it you—and there to cruise between Capes la Vela and Gallinas until the arrival of the enemy. The station thus selected was from sixty to eighty leagues to leeward of Puerto Cabello, in which stronghold the *Antigone* was anchored, and as it commanded the passage between Oruba and the mainland, there was little fear that the Spanish frigate would slip by us unseen.

On first starting Captain Douglas had been

full of spirits, with a pleasant smile and a jest for every one ; but when day after day passed, and then week after week, whilst still there appeared no sign of the enemy, then I am bound to confess that his face grew stern, and that he exercised the ship's company at gun-drill to such an extent that the poor fellows anathematized the dilatory Dons with heart-felt fervour. Our provisions and water also began to run short, and it would be necessary to return to Jamaica to replenish them ; but before doing so Captain Douglas resolved on working to windward and ascertaining whether the *Antigone* had slipped past us in the night-time, or was still at Puerto Cabello.

On arriving off the place all doubts were at an end. There lay the *ci-devant* British frigate inside the harbour, moored head and stern between two strong batteries, which mounted one hundred guns each. She had her sails bent and was ready for sea, but evidently her crew found more pleasure in their present snug position than in encountering the perils of the broad ocean.

Captain Douglas took the *Vigilant* boldly in, standing on long after the forts had opened fire, and obtaining a thorough knowledge of the enemy's position, in what manner she was moored, in short, all the information that could

be acquired by sharp eyes and good glasses. This he continued doing for three days, causing the batteries and the frigate to man their guns whenever we approached, but retiring again before any damage could be inflicted on us. I have often wondered what the lazy Dons thought of the pestilent little British gadfly that stung them out of their torpor two or three times a day.

And at each successive visit that we paid the Spaniards the visage of Captain Douglas grew less in length, and his aspect more cheerful, until on the third day he positively beamed, when his clerk remarked prophetically, "The skipper has got his fighting face on, and I saw the steward cleaning his pistols in the fore-cabin. Mark my words, he'll attack those greasy loafers before twenty-four hours have passed over our heads."

That worthy scribe was right. Peace be with his ashes; for the poor fellow perished in the conflict he so cleverly foretold.

During the three days passed off Puerto Cabello Captain Douglas had said no word to any living creature concerning the *Antigone*, the batteries, or his intentions regarding them; but when his afternoon dinner was over, a message came requesting the presence of all officers in his cabin, when he simply told them

that he proposed addressing the men immediately after quarters, and requested their aid in seconding his wishes. What the precise nature of the forthcoming enterprise was remained still a secret, until a couple of hours later, when the retreat was beaten, and the men were piped aft to the quarter-deck. Then Captain Douglas, mounted on the conning-stool, made known his plans; and more simple, unmistakable orders could not have been issued by a Cæsar, a Hannibal, or a Wellington.

As to the speech, I remember every word of it, for, short and pithy though it was, each sentence caused the pulse to quicken and the hot blood to course more swiftly through the veins. How I can recall it even now—the expectant faces of the officers, the eager glances of the bare-headed crew, and the dying sun lighting up the stern but smiling features of the orator, at whose bidding his audience would pour forth their best blood freely, ungrudgingly, nay, joyously. War is a terrible evil, as I told you a few pages back, yet it has its bright sides too, and the enthusiasm of these simple-minded sailors, their love for their country, their forgetfulness of self, and their childlike belief in their leader and in themselves, were very touching, and calculated to make one forget the dark side of the picture.

"Gentlemen," said the captain, bowing to the group of officers, "I have asked you to be present to hear a few words I am about to say to the ship's company. Now, my lads," and he turned to the men, through whose mass a shiver of impatient excitement ran, "as you know, we have waited for that frigate there for the last seven weeks, and she shows no more intention of coming out now than she did then, for her officers know the *Vigilant* is standing by to take some of the gloss out of her new paint work. We are already short of water and provisions, and must leave here for fresh supplies, when the Dons will make sail and slip away, whilst the honour of capturing them and their ill-gotten prize will fall to some other ship more lucky than the *Vigilant*. That I cannot allow; so, my lads, we will just stand quietly in and hoist the boats out as soon as darkness covers our proceedings from the enemy. This very night I intend cutting out the *Antigone*, and I expect every man amongst you to do his best to help me."

It was out now, there was no longer a secret. The crew of the *Vigilant* were called upon to perform a feat of unexampled heroism and of deadly peril—peril before which the stoutest heart might have reasonably shrank, so fearful

was the disparity of force, and so desperate the nature of the service.

And did they quail at their commander's announcement? No; before even the officers could make a sign, there burst from the lips of the men a cheer that shook the very timbers, and caused the fire of intense gratification to gleam in the eyes of the man who had awakened this enthusiasm. Cheer after cheer, shout after shout, joyous and exultant, rose to the sky, until the captain at length held up his hand to check them. More cheerfully than bridegroom to his chamber would hurry forth this devoted band to their couch of wounds and death.

"I thank you, my men," continued the captain. "And now I *know* we shall succeed, though I confess I never expected anything else from the 'Vigilants.' Silence now, and hear me," for there were signs of renewed cheering. "I shall lead you myself; and here, Sterne, you will find a list of the men and officers to be employed in the six boats that will undertake the expedition, together with precise instructions, from which there is to be no deviation on any pretence. Muster the crews at once, and see all ready for instant service."

With a bow the speaker left the conning-stool and went below, followed by a ringing cheer,

which, if it made his heart leap as it did mine, must have caused my cousin infinite pleasure. How proud I felt of him that day, of his courage, his manly bearing, and of the ease with which he acquired the confidence of his crew.

But now all ears were strained as the first lieutenant read out the list of those told off for active service. As each name was called its lucky owner sprang forward with a smile, whilst the faces of those left behind assumed a darker and more disappointed aspect. It might have been a party of pleasure from which the latter were excluded, to judge by the depression they exhibited. I was fortunate enough to be selected for the captain's own boat, the pinnace, in my old capacity of aide-de-camp; but little Paul's name was nowhere on the list, at which he was bitterly disappointed. In a hand-to-hand fight a youngster is only in the way, and occupies the place of a better man. It was my activity alone that caused me to be taken.

At half-past seven, when darkness had fallen, the boats were hoisted out, the crews mustered and inspected, and the final directions given to both officers and men. Every soul employed in the expedition was dressed in blue from head to foot, not a scrap of white being permitted. The password was 'Britannia,' the reply 'Scotland.'

Then the boats were manned, the boarders taking the oars at first, and being relieved by the regular crews as we neared the *Antigone*, so as to be in good wind when they were laid alongside the frigate.

The plan drawn out by Captain Douglas was simplicity itself, and scarcely capable of being misunderstood. It was as follows :—

The boats to proceed in two divisions. The first, consisting of the pinnace, launch, and jolly-boat, to board on the *Antigone's* starboard—or inside—bow, gangway, and quarter; the second division, consisting of the gig, first and second cutters, to board on the port—or outside—bow, gangway, and quarter respectively. The captain in the pinnace, with his clerk, the gunner, myself, and a crew of sixteen men, to command the entire expedition; the launch, under Lieutenant Blomfield, and with twenty-five men, was detailed to board on the starboard bow, and had a platform rigged above her stern, from which the frigate's cables were to be cut with sharp axes provided for that purpose; the jolly-boat, with a midshipman, the carpenter, and eight men, to board on the starboard quarter, to cut the stern cable, and to send two hands immediately aloft to loose the mizzen-topsail. The first cutter, under the command of Lieu-

tenant Duncan, with Mr. Seaton, the marine officer, sixteen men in all, to board on the port gangway; the second cutter, with sixteen hands, under the boatswain, to board on the port quarter; whilst the gig, under the command of Dr. Henderson, and also manned by sixteen men, was to board on the port bow, to send four hands aloft to loose the fore-topsail, to cut the bunt and clew lines, and to foot the sail well clear of the top rim for sheeting home. Each division to be in tow—that is to say, that the three boats forming each division were to be fastened together by their painters, so that there could be no chance of their separating from each other and going astray in the darkness.

By the above—which I am compelled to give fully, in order that you may understand the whole affair—it will be seen that each boat had her own distinct station, and her crew their own distinct duties to perform. But in addition, the following directions were given to the whole expedition collectively, and I must ask you lads to bear them in mind, for they are of great importance to the proper understanding of this desperate enterprise.

In the event of the flotilla reaching the *Antigone* undiscovered, only the boarders were

to climb over her side, the crews remaining in their boats, and taking the frigate in tow directly the cables had been cut, with hook ropes especially supplied to each for that purpose. If, however, as was by far the most probable, the enemy should be on the watch and discover the advancing boats, so as to preclude all possibility of a surprise, then the crews of each boat were to board as best they could at the positions assigned to them, and each man was to lend his utmost endeavours to bring the enterprise to a successful termination. Finally, the rendezvous for every one was to be the quarter-deck of the *Antigone*.

Such were the orders—clear, simple, and carefully thought out. On reading them it would be thought that they were incapable of being misinterpreted, and yet a circumstance arose which had not been provided for, and which very nearly frustrated the whole plan, plainly and daringly conceived as it was.

At length the men, armed with pistols, cutlasses, and muskets, were all in their places, and without a moment's delay the flotilla shoved off; and having formed a tow as ordered, both divisions keeping abreast of each other, gave way for the harbour of Puerto Cabello. From the time of leaving the *Vigilant* until the

pinnacle reached her destination at the Spaniard's starboard gangway, Captain Douglas never lost sight of the *Antigone*. From beginning to end he stood up in the boat with his night-glass fixed upon the frigate, and whispered directions to the coxswain how he was to steer; thus a perfectly straight course was maintained, and no unnecessary ground lost. So we pulled on until Hunter, the clerk, remarked, "I think I can make out the loom of a vessel on the beam, sir;" and the words were scarcely out of his mouth when there came a flash, and the whistle of a round shot over our heads, followed immediately by another from a different quarter. We had been discovered by a couple of Spanish gun-boats, armed with a long eighteen-pounder each.

"Cast off!" cried the captain at the top of his voice, for the alarm had been given, and further precaution was needless. "Cast off, and remember the rendezvous—the prize's quarter-deck. Give way, my lads; we'll be alongside of her in ten minutes."

With a cheer the crew bent to their oars, and we dashed rapidly through the darkness over the mile of water that still separated us from the Spaniard, Captain Douglas naturally concluding that the entire flotilla was following him, and that the concentrated force would arrive

alongside the frigate almost at the same moment. Here, however, he was reckoning without his host ; for, in direct contravention of the positive orders given, some of the boats chose to engage the two wretched gun vessels, and this disobedience nearly led to the failure of the entire enterprise, and the destruction of those who adhered to the plan agreed upon.

As the pinnace dashed onward we saw lights moving about the *Antigone*, and perceived that her crew were fully alive to the meditated attack, and by the time we had neared her within musket-shot, the whole of her men were at their quarters ready to receive us. To reach our appointed station on the starboard gangway it was necessary to cross the frigate's bows, when a shot passed close over us, whilst at the same time the boat was brought up by a line which extended from the *Antigone* to her anchor buoy. This obstacle was cleared by unshipping the rudder, in which it had jammed, but it had served to bring the pinnace immediately under the starboard cat-head and fore-chains of the Spaniard ; so, as the position could not be bettered, the captain at once gave the order to lay the oars in and to board.

The first man to swing himself up into the enemy's fore-chains, and from thence over the

netting on to her forecastle, was Captain Douglas, who was closely followed by all the boarders, some of whom, under his directions, freed the foresail, which was lying over the forestay ready for bending, and this canvas formed an excellent screen for the few English who had gained a footing on board.

Shoulder to shoulder we rushed aft to the skid-gratings, and then discovered that our presence was still unsuspected by the Spaniards, who were at quarters on the main-deck and blazing away madly into the darkness at some imaginary foe ; but the enemy on the quarter-deck soon became aware of our arrival, and forming into a compact body, pushed resolutely forward to prevent the further advance of the British.

By this time Dr. Henderson had boarded in the gig, and his men had gained possession of the quarter-deck, which was almost deserted owing to the enemy having come forward to drive us—the pinnace's crew—back. Quite forgetting, in the heat of the moment, that the rendezvous was the *Antigone's* quarter-deck, the surgeon's party followed the Spaniards as they advanced to attack us, and thus placed the Dons between two fires from which they suffered severely, but notwithstanding they were

in such strength that they beat the pinnacle's crew back foot by foot, and almost regained possession of the forecastle.

In the mean time Captain Douglas, closely attended by Hunter and me, had made his way along the other gangway to the quarter-deck, and there we three stood the solitary occupants of that important post, with the Spaniards blazing away furiously on the main-deck beneath us. Eagerly and anxious we glanced round for the support which should have reached us from the other boats, but not a soul appeared, whilst we could hear that the Dons were getting the better of the pinnacle's crew on the forecastle.

"Run to the port quarter and hurry up the cutter's crew, Powerscourt," cried the captain impatiently, "and you, Hunter, jump up aloft and let fall the mizzen-topsail."

In an instant we started on our respective errands, leaving our gallant commander the sole occupant of the *Antigone's* quarter-deck. On peering into the darkness over the frigate's stern, I could find no trace of the cutter, neither did any friendly voice answer to my cautious hail, so I returned to the quarter-deck to find Captain Douglas attacked simultaneously by four Spaniards, against whom he was defending himself with the greatest skill and agility, but the

odds were too overwhelming, and just as I came up one of the fellows, who had stolen behind, felled him to the deck by a blow from the butt of his musket. So great was the force employed that the weapon which inflicted the wound was broken clean in two, and the skipper sank immediately on the combing of the after hatchway, bleeding and senseless.

Without a moment's hesitation I passed my sword through the Spaniard's body and fired a pistol at another of the gang. How I should have fared after this is doubtful, but at that critical moment four or five of the pinnace's crew came tumbling aft, and the Dons were cut down in a twinkling.

But now the best efforts of the half-dozen British on the quarter-deck were directed to resisting the attempts of the Spaniards, amongst whom the alarm had at length spread, to swarm up the after-hatchway from the main-deck. With all the strength I could muster I succeeded in pulling the motionless body of my cousin from off the combings, where it was exposed to the random shots and slashes of the infuriated combatants, and, resting the head upon my knee, I managed to pour down the throat some rum from a flask which Hunter handed me. Poor fellow, it was his last, though

by no means his first, good action, for immediately afterwards a musket-shot crashed through his brain and he fell down the hatchway, his body knocking away half-a-dozen Spaniards in its descent.

To my intense joy Captain Douglas immediately gave signs of returning animation, and in less than a minute he was on his feet aiding and encouraging his handful of men. It was a desperate position, for the support so confidently relied upon had not appeared, and the few British on board the enemy could not possibly hold the upper deck for any length of time against so powerful a foe. Our fellows fought like men possessed, and bowled the Spaniards down the hatchways, but this could not last long, for the very violence of their exertions caused exhaustion.

At this juncture, both from the port quarter and gangway was heard the cry of 'Britannia,' mingled with welcome British cheers.

The countersign 'Scotland' rose from the lips of our small band, and the crews of both cutters appeared to our rescue.

Instantly the marines were formed on the quarter-deck, and poured a withering fire down the hatchway, which caused the Dons to withdraw, when down rushed the British on to the

main-deck, and literally swept it with fixed bayonets. Some sixty of the Spaniards retreated to the after cabin and surrendered; they were instantly disarmed, secured, and the doors closed upon them, but on the fore-part of the main-deck and under the forecastle the scrimmage still continued with unabated vigour.

By this time the stern-moorings had been cut and the *Antigone* was swinging head to wind. The launch's crew, whose duty it was to cut the bower-cable, were half a mile distant, frittering away the precious minutes with the wretched gun-boats. On perceiving this Captain Douglas hailed the men in the pinnace, who after great trouble succeeded in severing the tough hemp, and the prize—for such we now regarded her—was free!

The skipper at once sent all boats ahead to tow, he himself taking up his favourite position on the conning-stool, whilst the gallant gunner and two seamen, all of whom had borne the brunt of the fight and were severely wounded, went to the helm. Far above the crack of musketry, the shrieks, oaths, and confusion of a hand-to-hand combat, there arose a grand British cheer, numbing the hearts of the Spaniards within them, as the boats' crews tugged at their

staves, and a gentle rippling under the bows announced that the captured frigate was gathering headway, and a still more frantic burst of joy rent the air when the fore and mizzen-top-sails filled, lightening the services of the boats in towing, and the *Antigone* stood out to join the *Vigilant*, no more bearing the golden banner of Spain and awakening remorse in every English sailor's breast, but with our own brave flag fluttering aloft, and our own gallant hands in possession of her decks.

With the filling of the sails all resistance ceased, and the Spaniards, casting away their arms, cried for quarter; but now the batteries opened and kept up a heavy fire, which happily, owing to the flurry of the gunners and the darkness of the night, did little serious damage, though several shots took effect below the water-line, and one of them killed four Spaniards who were crouched in the steerage, which the poor fellows had thought to be a place of safety.

It was about one o'clock in the morning when the pinnace boarded, and a little less than an hour afterwards when the prize was out of gunshot and the towing-boats were called alongside; their crews then setting foot on board the captured frigate for the first time.

Desperate as the service was, and nearly as

its success was frustrated by disobedience of orders, our loss was surprisingly small. Poor Hunter, the captain's clerk, was the only man killed, and twelve wounded, including Captain Douglas, made the sum-total of our disasters. Individually I escaped without a scratch, but the Spaniards, out of a crew of 365, had 119 men killed and 97 wounded, a disproportion which it is difficult to account for. We sent all prisoners back to Puerto Cabello a couple of days later in a captured schooner, and exactly a week after her victory, the *Vigilant*, accompanied by the prize, anchored once more in Port Royal.

Of our welcome there I need not speak, neither does it become one who played a part, however obscure, in the deeds of that memorable night, to mention how thoroughly our service was esteemed, and how proud we all felt of our skipper, our frigate, our prize, and—ourselves! Having undergone a thorough repair whilst in the Spanish service, the *Antigone* was immediately restored to her former rank in the British Navy; but the name which had brought such discredit on the Service was for ever buried in oblivion, and when she again went to sea, it was as the *Restitution*.

I imagine that ship will never again be called

the *Antigone* as long as the Royal Navy holds together, and let us hope that will be for a good many centuries to come.

Over two months had passed by since we left Port Royal, and now on our return we were delighted to find letters in answer to those despatched more than three months before.

My poor father wrote to Captain Douglas, to little Paul, and me. Let me take the letters in succession, for they were of importance.

To his relative, Edward Douglas, he conveyed the warmest thanks, and signified the deepest gratitude for all that he had done, and enclosed an ample cheque to defray the expenses of our outfits and to supply us with pocket-money, whilst promising that all orders drawn upon his bank in our favour should be duly met. His letter also contained certain information concerning little Paul's parentage, which my father had discovered, but this Captain Douglas did not read to me, though my own letter made me acquainted with its general drift. In conclusion, my father said that we youngsters should congratulate ourselves on having fallen under the command of so distinguished an officer, and begged Captain Douglas, if he was satisfied with us in other respects, to keep us on board the *Vigilant*, and under his own eye, until the

frigate's return to England. It was just the manly, honest, and grateful epistle that I should have expected my dear father to have penned, and I could see that Captain Douglas was pleased with its tone, and also glad that we were to remain under his protection.

The letters to little Paul and me may be treated as one, by which means matters will be simplified and time saved. I must confess to a tinge of remorse on opening mine, for the very handwriting on the outside of the folded sheet carried me back to the gentle student at Old Shoreham, and raised fresh regrets for the misery and anxiety that my foolhardy rashness had caused to that loving heart. I should even have been glad had the letter contained a censure, either direct or implied, but there was no word from beginning to end that was not kind, loving, even playful, in the grave way that my father's humour showed itself.

But beyond this there were pieces of intelligence that startled both Paul and myself. Foremost of these was the disappearance of Irmac. It appeared that when we failed to return from the fishing-ground, the Siberian at once took the very gloomiest view of the case, and came to the conclusion that we were both drowned; indeed so strongly had this idea taken possession of

him, that for the next week the poor fellow roamed the beach between Shoreham and Worthing on the look-out for Rurick—he believed the bear would swim ashore—or for any traces of the lost boat. When nothing turned up the honest fellow grew melancholy and wretched, pining for his lost master from daylight till dark, and growing more gaunt and miserable from day to day. Of course he took to the brandy-bottle as a comforter, but it seemed beyond the power of even ardent spirits to cheer him, and one day he disappeared altogether, leaving no sign by which he could be traced. My father, greatly alarmed, caused the country to be scoured and all inquiries made, but no confirmed news of the runaway had been yet obtained. A rumour was afloat that the huge form of the Siberian had been seen by some Shoreham fishermen on the forecastle of a Bering Strait whaleship, but when my father came to question them, their accounts were so contradictory and vague that no reliance could be placed in the story. Irmac had disappeared, but his fate remained a mystery.

The next piece of intelligence that startled us was that, upon making search amongst the mass of rubbish left by the Siberian, my father had discovered, carefully concealed, a small package

wrapped in fur, which on being opened he was exceedingly surprised to find contained a letter, addressed to himself, in the handwriting of his sister Olga.

This letter, which cunning had led Irmac to suppress, confirmed my father's latent suspicion that little Paul was the son of Prince Loriskoff and of the English girl whom he had married; for the boy's baptismal certificate was enclosed, and my father's knowledge of Russia convinced him that it was genuine and in every particular in conformity with the legal requirements of that empire. The poor girl's letter was necessarily a sad one, for it was penned when the hand of death was soon to be laid on her, and amidst surroundings that would have broken a far stouter heart; but the passionate appeal on behalf of her helpless son was not likely to be unheeded by a man so affectionate in disposition as my father, and he resolved to cherish the little fellow and bring him up as his acknowledged nephew until the whirligig of time would permit the exile to resume his position in society, when he should find a son worthy of the honour to which his high birth entitled him.

In his letter to little Paul—my first cousin now—my father subjoined many particulars of which the boy had been ignorant, for, on becoming

acquainted with his favourite and only daughter's death amidst the hardships and privations of the Siberian wilderness, and on learning the steadfast devotion with which she had followed the husband of her choice to that abode of misery, my stern old grandfather saw all too late how inhuman his conduct had been, and the knowledge of this preyed so bitterly upon him, that within a year from receiving the news of my Aunt Olga's death, old John Powerscourt followed his daughter to the grave, leaving his whole fortune to my father, his only surviving child.

This was in substance the news communicated in my father's letters to little Paul and myself, but notwithstanding that his noble birth was now fully established, both Captain Douglas and my father considered it wiser that the boy should retain the purser's name by which he was now known, and should continue on the *Vigilant's* books as Paul Maldon.





CHAPTER XVI.

ROUND THE HORN.

QUR stay in Port Royal was not a long one, for the heat inflaming the severe wound on Captain Douglas' head, the admiral ordered us off to Halifax, where the frosts of a Canadian winter would soon set matters right. Correspondence being once established with my father, we now heard regularly by every packet, and I felt very proud on learning how the pulse of all England had quickened on hearing of Captain Douglas' gallant deed, and how the king himself had spoken of it in words of genuine admiration. Indeed, we were all rather afraid that his increased renown would lead to our losing our brave skipper, who would be promoted into some larger ship, and these fears increased when he was created a baronet and became Sir Edward Douglas. But I have heard since that

he pleaded hard with the Admiralty not to be separated from the brave fellows whom he had so often led to victory, and that the Duke of Clarence—an old messmate and chum—backed up his request, so that, for a wonder, it was granted. I say ‘for a wonder,’ because the Board at Whitehall are by no means prone to take a sentimental view of affairs, and are guided in their promotions and appointments by the most matter-of-fact and prosaic of reasons.

Into details of all the *Vigilant* did, or the various places that she visited during the next two years, I shall not enter. It was a continual record of harassing the enemy by sea and by land, cutting up the French trade by the capture of their ships, and varying this by blowing up their forts. Both little Paul and I had sprung up considerably and were now midshipmen, thoroughly conversant with our duty, and able to navigate a prize with ease to her destination. We had both seen our fair share of the active service on which the boats of the frigate were constantly engaged, and Paul had come off unhurt, whilst a Johnny Crapaud had given me that clip across the cheek with his cutlass which destroyed all my chances as a lady-killer for ever. The *Vigilant* was a happy ship,

with as smart, daring, and contented a crew as any in the British Navy. The men loved their captain and respected their officers, whilst the latter were always mindful of the comfort of their subordinates. During those whole two years the gratings were only rigged once, and then for the punishment of an incorrigible thief, whose misdemeanours were brought to light by the crew themselves. This black sheep was soon drafted out of the flock, and then all went smoothly, although there was no ship in the fleet on board of which discipline was more strictly upheld. I mention this to show you that the lash could be dispensed with by a good officer even in eighteen hundred and war-time. I must add that during this period Rurick had increased considerably in bulk and enormously in cleverness. He knew every man in the ship, and could tell the meaning of the different pipes as well as any of the crew—more particularly the pipe to dinner, or when the grog was to be served out, for even my love for the animal must not prevent me from saying that a considerable demoralization had taken place in his character under the instruction of that old toper the captain of the forecastle. The bear had his allowance of rum-and-water just like anybody else, and at divisions on Sunday it was most

ludicrous to see him toeing a line beside his profligate old sea daddy, and bending his great head in salutation as the captain passed along in the course of his inspection. The animal was the pet of the whole ship's company, but truth compels me to say that this constant pampering spoiled him, and he more than once showed signs of giving trouble, particularly if people from the shore were on board, for he seemed to know and hate a landsman by instinct. To little Paul he was always abjectly obedient, and at his command would perform tricks he never could be induced to exhibit for the general edification.

Thus two years and a little more passed away, and at the end of that time I found myself prizemaster on board a beautiful armed schooner which we had captured off Guadaloupe. The *Vigilant* had sailed for Port Royal, whither I was to follow in the *Fantôme*, but owing to the latter having been a good deal knocked about in her rigging, the frigate had got a couple of days ahead of me, and I was now lying within ten miles of the harbour waiting for the sea-breeze to spring up and carry me in.

On stepping over the *Vigilant's* gangway to report myself, one of my brother midshipmen hastened up and said, "Here's a lark, Powers-

court. Orders have just arrived from England, and we are bound for the Pacific. Round the Horn, my boy! How will you like that?"

"Tell that yarn to the marines," I replied incredulously, "for you can't gammon me, Master Tim," and I pushed past him to the officer of the watch, whom I begged to make known my arrival to Sir Edward Douglas, and was at once informed that the latter wished to see me.

After a friendly greeting and a few questions concerning my passage, the captain continued, "And how does the schooner sail?"

"She would be a regular clipper, sir, if her rigging was repaired and canvas could be put on her."

"A decent sea-boat?" he continued.

"I had only one strong breeze," I replied, "but she stood up as stiff as a church-steeple, and shipped scarcely any water."

"Would she stand a voyage round the Horn, do you think?"

"The Horn?" I repeated in astonishment, as my messmate's communication rushed to my mind. "Yes, sir, I should think so if her bulwarks were raised on. She lies a little low now for a heavy sea."

"Then I shall have a good look at her at once, and if she appears suitable I shall ask the

admiral to let me take her as a tender. Return on board her at once, and as you pass up tell the officer of the watch to man my gig; I shall be on board the *Fantôme* almost as soon as you."

I departed much mystified and not best pleased to think that, after all, there might be more truth than I suspected in Master Tim Reilly's cock-and-bull yarn. Round the Horn, in the quiet waters of the Pacific, we should be away from all the fun and from all chances of winning fresh honour, whilst the period for our return to England would be indefinitely prolonged, and I was anxious to see my dear father and the beautiful place which he had bought in Sussex.

Since my grandfather's death I had been the heir to a large fortune, and the prospect of missing prize-money was of smaller importance to me than to some of my less-favoured mess-mates, but of honour I was more greedy than ever, and I stepped over the *Fantôme's* side to await the *Vigilant's* skipper in no very pleasant frame of mind.

Sir Edward Douglas was accompanied by the carpenter and boatswain. Both of these worthy seamen appeared desperately ill at ease when in such close proximity to their captain, and each

perched himself on the very edge of the stern-sheets, and in so forward a position as almost to impede the movements of the after-oarsman.

The sum-total of the minute inspection made by these three experts was that the *Fantôme* would make a most suitable tender for the *Vigilant*, being quite a new schooner, built on beautiful lines, and fitted up with more than ordinary care. Her low bulwarks would require heightening, and then she could encounter any reasonable weather without danger.

When the captain, with the two warrant-officers still in tow, had gone ashore to the admiral's office, I was delighted by a visit from little Paul, for I was burning with curiosity to learn the reason for the abrupt change of station which seemed to threaten the *Vigilant*. The boy could only repeat to me the common rumour, but it turned out to be sufficiently near the truth, and was to this effect.

Of late years a large fleet of British whalers had frequented Bering Strait and the adjoining coasts in pursuance of their avocations, but now the Russian Government had claimed possession of the Aleutian Islands, with their herds of valuable sea-otters, and had driven off the crews of all foreign ships by force of arms. It was to protect the interests of our countrymen in that

inclement region that a fast-sailing frigate was required, and the *Vigilant* had been selected by the Admiralty for the service.

But there was yet another reason why protection should be afforded to the whalers, although this was known only to our captain at the time of which I am writing. This was that a pirate schooner of large size and unknown nationality had for the last three years been plundering the traders in that part, and carrying off the enormously valuable furs which had been obtained, at the cost of infinite privation, from the natives of Kamtchatka and Alaska. Like the graceful frigate-bird of the tropics, which soars aloft serene and indifferent until the heavy, awkward gannet has filled his pouch, and then swoops down on the timid runaway, forcing her to disgorge her hardly-acquired prey to the last fin, so this ocean robber bore down upon the peaceful traders, clearing them out to the last pelt, and then disappearing until the following season. Where she lurked during the long months of winter, when every harbour on the Asian coast was sealed with ice, or where she found a market for her plunder, were both equally unknown, although she was suspected of getting rid of the latter amongst the Chinese, who offer enormous prices for costly furs, and

do not trouble the vendor with unnecessary questions as to how he obtained them. As regards her hiding-place, the whole coast from the Gulf of Anadyr to the Sea of Japan was perforated by inlets in which a small craft could lie snugly and defy all risks of discovery. To capture this audacious pirate when laden with booty would yield more prize-money than half-a-dozen ordinary merchant ships, not to mention the large sum offered for her destruction by the Hudson's Bay Company and the whaling associations of Dundee and Aberdeen.

It was with a full knowledge of the dangers with which that rugged and imperfectly surveyed coast abounded, and the risks that would be encountered by a ship of the *Vigilant's* size when poking about in a shallow sea, that Sir Edward proposed to the admiral that the *Fantôme* should accompany him as tender. As the schooner was the *Vigilant's* prize, and it was proposed to man her out of the frigate's crew, Sir Pelt could raise no objection, even had he felt inclined to, so a fortnight later we put to sea, and steered for the southward, the *Fantôme* being placed under the command of Lieutenant Duncan, with a crew of twenty-seven officers and men. The rendezvous was to be the island of Juan Fernandez, the desert home

of Alexander Selkirk, for the now Independent South American States were at that time vassals of the Spanish Crown, so we had to keep clear of them.

I am not thinking of boring you with any description of the passage round, beyond mentioning that the weather was very bad, and a two years' sojourn in the tropics had not exactly accustomed our men to the blinding snow-storms, the icebergs, and the piercing cold of Cape Horn. The hands, on one occasion, were over two hours aloft trying to furl the foretopsail, which was frozen stiff as a board. When at length they reached the deck, four of the poor fellows were frost-bitten and lost either toes or fingers.

It was small wonder then that we rejoiced greatly when the stormy Cape was left astern, and every day brought us farther into the smooth waters and balmy climate of the Pacific Ocean.

Sir Edward, who was not the man to let a single chance slip through his fingers, kept a hand constantly at the masthead, and offered a reward to the sharp eyes that should first discover a strange sail. He also stood pretty close along the coast of Chili, in the hope of discovering a Spanish treasure-ship creeping down along the land, but we only fell in with a

barque carrying cattle, provisions, wine, and vegetables to the settlement of Chiloë. All these delicacies we transferred to the frigate before burning the prize, and very welcome they were to men who had been several weeks on salt meat and hard tack.

Not until we had been a fortnight at Juan Fernandez did Mr. Duncan turn up, and then the saucy little *Fantôme* looked very tempest-tossed and woe-begone. But a week at anchor and a lick of paint set both crew and schooner to rights, when both ships started again, the rendezvous on this occasion to be Vancouver's Island.

In due course we were safely anchored there, and as it was now the month of June, and the pirate schooner's visit to the Bering Strait fleet would take place in the early autumn, it behoved us to concert measures for her capture before she could inflict much damage, and it was resolved that the *Vigilant* should join the whaling fleet, whilst the *Fantôme*, with her crew increased to forty men, and with a couple of carronades in addition to the long eighteen-pounder she carried amidships, should make for the Commander Islands, off the Kamtchatkan coast, within sight of which group the pirate must certainly pass either when going in

search of plunder or when returning from her predatory expedition. She was to continue under the command of Mr. Duncan, and little Paul was also sent as midshipman and interpreter, whilst at my especial request I was also allowed to exchange with the midshipman who had come round the Horn in the schooner, and who was heartily sick of her cramped accommodation and wet decks by this time. Needless to say that Rurick accompanied us, although the *Vigilant's* men grumbled greatly at the temporary loss of their shaggy playfellow.

We left Esquimalt about the middle of June, keeping company whilst we ran to the northward and finally to the westward, following the chain of the Aleutian Islands. Here the Russians had established themselves, and the unhappy natives were fast dying out under the cruel treatment to which they were subjected by their brutal taskmasters. Scores of ruffians from the Kamtchatkan coast had pushed their way eastward to bring rapine, bloodshed, and misery to these peaceful, if barren and inhospitable isles. At first these savage adventurers slaughtered the inoffensive inhabitants, whose fish-spears and seal-clubs were of small avail against the muskets of the new-comers, and robbed them of the costly furs which the mur-

dered natives had collected for barter ; but they finally adopted the plan of employing these timid creatures as slaves, in which capacity they sent them out otter-hunting, and spared their lives, or the lash, if the unhappy fellows brought back a sufficiently rich harvest. It made the blood of every man on board the *Vigilant* boil to see the brutality with which these amiable and friendly savages were treated by the far greater savages who had forced their way to these quiet islands, turning them into abodes of wretchedness, in the name of the Czarina and of Christianity. These white scoundrels, whose faith was the grossest superstition mixed with idolatry and shamanism, held it as perfectly just to plunder and enslave the Aleuts because the latter were not members of the orthodox Greek Church ! A pretty set of miscreants to be numbered within the fold of any religion, and yet members of the Imperial family participated in the gains derived from this blood-stained plunder.

Every ship that we met was stopped and questioned, but nothing had been heard of the pirate that summer, so when we had reached the western islet of the Aleutian chain, Mr. Duncan went on board the frigate and received his final instructions from Sir Edward Douglas,

after which the *Vigilant* filled and stood northward into Bering Sea, while the *Fantôme* continued her course to the westward.

How different were our present surroundings from those of a year ago! Then we were sweltering under a deep blue sky, with a fiery sun glaring down pitilessly and making the pitch in the seams bubble; now the air was laden with a perpetual foggy moisture, through which the sun showed like a dull ball of copper. Everything within sight—and the range of vision was very limited—looked grey and dripping.

“A rare old spot for the rheumatiz,” remarked the schooner’s cook; and the *doctor* had hit our new station off to a nicety.





CHAPTER XVII.

POOR RURICK!

AS an anchorage the Commander Islands are not worthy of praise, for there is simply no thoroughly protected haven amongst them, and the rude Siberian coasters solve this difficulty by running their clumsy craft up on the beach and leaving them in that novel position until they are ready to sail. We found one of them thus situated, and were enabled to form a just idea of the semi-savages who oppress and destroy the unhappy natives, making the very name of 'Russian' abominated, when the slightest sense of justice would have caused the yellow-haired strangers from the western mainland to be revered and respected.

Such a contrivance as the trading craft herself was, no European shipwright would believe; and certainly no European sailor would have trusted

his life half a mile from land in such a hooker. A Chinese junk was a masterpiece of naval architecture beside her, and would sail two knots to her one. Imagine an old pine-built scow, thrown together roughly, caulked and varnished, and then finished off by a brace of masts, with square sails, being stuck into her wherever it seemed most convenient to the designer to place them. With this simple rig the trader can only run free, and is unable to put to sea unless the wind is perfectly fair. The skipper of this craft wanted to make the Aleutian Islands, and, although the breeze was from the westward, he dared not leave his present situation until the weather lifted sufficiently to show his destination. There was no compass on board, no quadrant, no chronometer, and nobody who possessed the slightest knowledge of such instruments even had they been to hand.

But if the ship was rough, what am I to say of the scowling, bearded banditti who manned her? In after years I travelled through Siberia and saw many faces that mutilation at the hands of the executioner had rendered hideous, but every third man of this crew was disfigured for some crime of the deepest dye. Who they were and from whence they were collected I know not, but I remember thinking at the time

that if the pirate schooner had such another gang of murderous desperadoes she would prove an uncommon hard nut for the little *Fantôme* to crack.

The skipper of this crazy craft was inclined to be exceedingly insolent in his demeanour, but little Paul strode up to the fellow with a cane in his hand and said something in Russian, whereat the saucy rascal became most humble and submissive, for there exists no honest, independent, lower-middle class amongst the Muscovites, where every man is either haughty noble or cringing serf. My cousin succeeded in thoroughly frightening him, however, and the following morning he hauled his craft off the beach and sailed eastward into the haze. Whether he ever reached his destination I am unable to say.

For more than a fortnight we lay at anchor, but there came no pirate schooner, and we were all very much disgusted at the monotony and dulness of the life we were forced to lead. At the suggestion of little Paul—he was a pretty big chap now, but the affectionate diminutive slips off my pen unwittingly—the *Fantôme* was disguised, by making use of portions of a wrecked trader which we found on the beach. The carpenters adjusted them in such a manner

as to make the graceful schooner look ugly and clumsy; and the men were also encouraged to dress themselves in coats made from the fur seal, of which animal there was a rookery on the island. Wearied of further inaction, Mr. Duncan resolved to weigh and take a cruise round Karaghinska Island, from the natives of which he hoped to gain some information of the pirate, through the medium of little Paul.

The sea in this part of the world is very shallow, which is good in so far that a ship overtaken by fog can generally drop her anchor and wait until the mist clears away. This course we adopted every night, for our charts were most inaccurate; indeed it would often have been better had we paid no attention to their misleading guidance. One afternoon when we had obtained a fair glimpse of the sun, and had taken trustworthy observations which showed us to be forty leagues from the nearest land, according to the charts, we stood on instead of anchoring as usual, but early in the first watch the look-out reported the beat of the surf on the weather-beam, so we brought up for the night, with the intention of exploring this *terra incognita* on the following morning. Both Paul and I went quietly to our bunks and fell sound asleep, little dreaming of the surprise, sorrow,

and joy which would be ours before the next sun had set.

At daylight the hands were turned up and the anchor weighed; when, for a wonder, the sun rose over a clear horizon and shone upon a low, wooded island, some four miles in length, lying about a mile to windward of us. There was nothing very remarkable about this dot on the ocean, beyond the fact that the vegetation with which it was clothed showed its soil to be more fertile than such volcanic elevations usually are; and, moreover, several curls of smoke arising from the forest indicated that the place was inhabited. At the wretched hole where we had passed the last fortnight there was no tree to be found higher than a juniper-bush, and no herb-age but coarse tussock grass, which would not have given a week's sustenance to a reindeer, an animal that will thrive where even a rat would starve. Here was an island of a more promising kind altogether, and visions of milk, cheese, and venison rose in the minds of the crew as we stood on, seeking some convenient break amongst the rocks which would afford a good landing-place for the boats.

Such a spot was not to be found on the lee side of the island, so we had to make a long leg towards the offing to get to windward, and it

was close upon noon when we dropped anchor off a sheltered cove with a sandy beach, on which several rude pine-boats were drawn up. The forest and undergrowth were both thicker here than they had been on the other side, the vegetation extending as far as the strip of sand which separated it from the water. Neither inhabitants nor houses were visible, but we thought little of that since the brushwood was dense enough to hide the latter, and the former had probably retired to collect such furs or other articles as they hoped to dispose of in barter.

“Nice kind of chap the man who laid down that,” said Mr. Duncan, pointing contemptuously to the faulty chart; “for he has left out the only place worth visiting that I have met since we came into these muddy waters. Can you make out any of the natives, Powerscourt? I think there seems to be a path running up through the forest which will lead to the village. Take the gig ashore, Maldon, and mind you bring off some fresh grub. They might give us information about the pirate too. Find out everything you can, and if there is anything worth seeing I’ll take half-an-hour on shore to stretch my legs when you return. Jump in and go too, Powerscourt; I know you lads like cruis-

ing together. I shall mark this place down on the chart under the name of Duncan Island."

Thus spoke the good-natured and loquacious lieutenant, and we, nothing loath, dived below to get our weapons whilst the boat was being manned.

"Ready for all emergencies, I see," laughed our commander as we reappeared, armed with swords and pistols. "Don't be like the Russians, and destroy all the inhabitants, and don't let Rurick eat up half the babes in the village. Come, hurry off, boys, and find out all you can, Maldon."

What I am now about to relate occurred so suddenly, and was so entirely unexpected, that, although the whole scene was enacted under my own eyes, it still appears like some distant and half-forgotten dream, that no effort of memory will serve to piece together intelligibly and completely. I know what happened, for I witnessed and bore part in it, and yet I can hardly realize the fashion in which it was brought about, so strange did it all seem, so incredible, so touching.

The distance from the *Fantôme* to the head of the small sandy bight towards which we were directing our course was little more than a quarter of a mile, and it took the four stout oarsmen in the gig less than five minutes to traverse

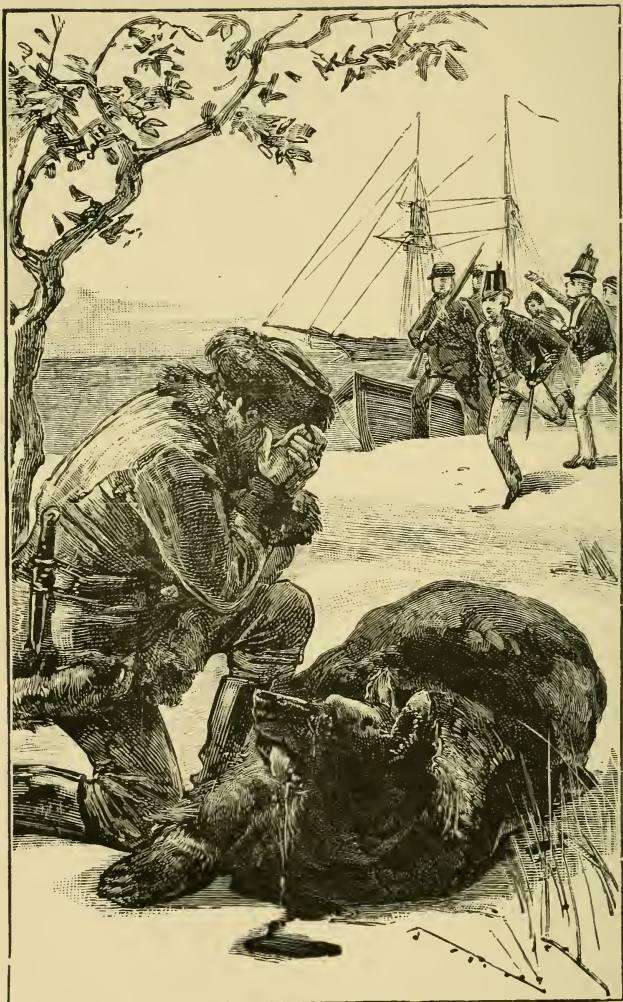
so short a space. Rurick was perched in the bows, sniffing eagerly, and twisting his nose about in a manner which indicated that something had excited him greatly.

"The old fellow smells the forest," I remarked laughingly to Paul; "I only hope he won't treat any of the inhabitants as he did the *Indomptable's* Frenchman."

"Don't be alarmed," replied Paul, standing up in the stern-sheets, and saying something in Russian which I could not understand, whilst at the same moment I gave the order, "Way enough," and the boat's bows ran gently up on the shelving beach.

"What can be the matter with Rurick?" cried Paul, as he sprang forward to check the bear; but the animal had already scrambled out of the bows, and was cantering towards the forest at a prodigious pace.

We stood watching him, when suddenly from the undergrowth there burst a wild-looking, emaciated figure of gigantic height, yelling out some order in a foreign and apparently a barbarous tongue, on hearing which the bear immediately stopped, and rearing his bulk aloft, began waggling his head and slobbering, whilst his nostrils worked in jerks through the excitement of the moment.



And rushing to the prostrate animal, fell on his knees by its side.—p. 275.

Then—shame and sorrow to tell it!—there sounded from the leafy covert the sharp crack of several guns—the ponderous Siberian weapon, in which the mechanism of the lock is *outside*, and the spring generally of tough wood—whilst poor Rurick staggered forward a couple of paces and then fell heavily on the sand.

With a wilder yell than before, a cry in which rage and sorrow were plainly discernible, the tall stranger dashed into the wood and harangued the people, who, unseen by us, were stationed there, and whose cruel weapons had taken away this innocent life. Then the giant broke his way forth again, and rushing to the prostrate animal, fell on his knees by its side.

The whole affair transpired so quickly, and I was so completely taken aback, that I could only stare in speechless wonder, from which I was aroused by the click of firearms, and the voice of Paul crying, “Don’t fire, men; put your muskets away. It is all a mistake, and enough damage has been done already. I know the man with Rurick; he is my servant.” Then turning to me he whispered—poor little Paul, how pale and ill he looked, and yet how calm and self-contained—

“Don’t you recognize Irmac, Frank? Tell

the crew to remain by their boat, and we will advance to greet him."

It was not without some trouble that I could pacify the blue-jackets, who were furious at the loss of their favourite, and would certainly have vented their wrath on the savage figure beside the dying animal, though his was not the hand that had wrought the mischief.

"Stack your muskets on the sand ready in case of need," I said, "but don't attempt to use them without an order from me."

They obeyed, but with less than their usual alacrity; and then Paul and I advanced to the spot where the wounded bear was lying, with the huge Siberian bending over him, and muttering in the creature's ear words which, though unintelligible to me, were fraught with an inexpressible tenderness of tone that betrayed too plainly the sorrow and sympathy of the speaker.

So engrossed was the kneeling man that he seemed quite heedless of our approach, but still whispered to the bear in tones of agonized entreaty. As we drew near I had seen that little Paul was right, and that it was in very truth Irmac who was before us; yet only by a misuse of the term can it be said that we saw the poor fellow in the flesh, so gaunt, so

miserably attenuated had he become. I was about to lay my hand on his shoulder, but Paul motioned me to forbear, whilst whispering, "He is asking poor Rurick to give him information of how I—how we, I should say—died ; imploring the animal to give him some sign of when or where we met our death."

I was still young, my lads, a mere boy in years, but I had knocked about the world a good deal, and seen death in some of its most dreaded forms. Many heart-breaking scenes had been enacted in my presence, and I thank the Almighty, who had left the well-spring of tenderness within my breast undried, and had never suffered me to become callous or unmindful of the feelings of others. This I may say, in all humbleness, is a mercy that has been continued to me down to the present hour ; for though the trunk be gnarled, and hollowed by the tooth of time, yet will its sap produce foliage as tender in its vivid green and as delicate in its fibre as the lusty young seedling that will ere long supplant the parent stem. It is not witnessing suffering, dear boys, that makes us hard and careless, but rather is it that we fail to draw lessons therefrom to our own advantage—lessons that teach us charity first, and with that greatest of virtues its concomitants of pity, gentleness,

and sympathy. Is not the dying Sir Philip Sidney, giving the last drops of precious water to a wounded soldier, a greater and a nobler man than Philip Sidney the successful courtier, or Philip Sidney the victorious warrior?

And as I gazed on that wild, faithful, half-idolatrous savage, and on the poor beast beneath him, a great flood of pity overwhelmed me. The earnestness of the man, and his evident belief that the bear could gratify his wish, were touching in themselves; but the great tenderness concealed beneath those rugged labials reached to my very heart, for they showed the absolute devotion of this strange being to the young master whom he now imagined was lost to him for ever.

And if the effect was great on me, how much more must it have been felt by that young master himself, who was standing unsuspected beside his devoted servant, and understood the wild petition that fell from his unshorn lips! The boy's pallor was so deadly that I feared he would swoon, and placed my arm around his waist. But soon the tears forced themselves from the eyes, and coursing slowly over the white cheek, brought with them some measure of relief from a tension too agonizing to be long endured.

Now and then the dying bear would try to raise his head, and at the effort the blood-stained froth would flow from his jaws and nostrils ; but his little eyes, that had seemed the very abode of mirthful cunning, were now glazing fast, for the film of death had quenched their twinkling brightness. Poor Irmac redoubled his entreaties, calling the animal, as Paul told me afterwards, by every endearing name which the language afforded ; but it is doubtful whether the meaning of the words penetrated to the fast-dulling brain.

Suddenly the voice of little Paul sounded, soft but thrilling ; I give his words in English. "Rurick, tell my faithful Irmac that the boy he thought drowned stands here before him."

Had affection power to put aside for one brief moment the King of Terrors, or was it a last effort attributable merely to extraordinary tenacity of life ? I know not ; but the words of his master seemed to reach the dying animal, and with the agility of old he reared his form aloft, confronting Paul, and wagging his head as of yore, while the blood spurted from the wounds in his breast, and the ensanguined slaver dropped from his drooping jaw.

For perhaps a moment he stood thus, then the light died suddenly out of the eyes, and Rurick fell forward at Paul's feet—dead !

During that moment Irmac stood like a demented being, his lips moving convulsively, and his startled eyes roving over Paul from head to foot. Then there came the light of recognition into his wan countenance, and from his lips there burst forth a yell of joy as he bounded forward, and falling at the boy's feet, began kissing and fondling his hand, whilst murmuring, "*Gospodin*—master—saved!"

"I shall leave you here," I said to Paul. "Come down to the beach and wave for the boat when you want her."


He pressed my hand thankfully, and then whispered, "Frank, this island holds more surprises for us; my father is here. Irmac appealed to poor Rurick in his name, and thus I found it out. Explain it all to Mr. Duncan."





CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE ISLAND.

N reaching the *Fantôme*, from whose deck every incident of this extraordinary scene had been visible, I found Mr. Duncan anxiously expecting me, for the report of guns had been heard on board the schooner, and he had at first feared that we were likely to encounter an unfriendly reception from the inhabitants of this mysterious and unknown island. Finding that no more firing took place, and seeing the gig's crew stack their muskets, the lieutenant concluded that the hostilities had ended with the death of Rurick, and he was bubbling over with impatience to learn the cause of the strange scene he had witnessed through his glass—the wild thin form of Irmac at the feet of little Paul, and the last exhibition of vitality in the dying animal.

To the very best of my power I satisfied him,

but, as you lads can see, the explanation I was able to give was very limited, and would remain so until my cousin's return. I was able, however, to enlighten the wondering officer with regard to our life at Shoreham, the character of Irmac, and his sudden disappearance as communicated to me in my father's letter. On hearing that the giant Siberian was now unquestionably found, the commander of the *Fantôme* became more cheerful and loquacious than ever, his north-country shrewdness showing him that through the medium of such an ally we should assuredly find out all about the pirate and the harbour in which she was wont to lie up during the winter months.

"That chap will be worth his weight in gold to us," remarked the sanguine officer. "I little thought when you two youngsters were adrift in the Channel, and gave us such trouble to heave-to, what a lot of prize-money you would put into all our pockets. What is it, signalman? Mr. Maldon's waving. Jump into the gig, Powerscourt, and bring him off; and get your friend Irmac too if you can, for I should like a good look at the fellow."

I had made no mention of what Paul had told me concerning his father, firstly, because the news appeared to me very doubtful; and

secondly, because I thought it would come better from the lips of the boy himself, who knew on what subjects to be explicit, and also what it was best, in the exile's interest, to suppress.

Immediately on the gig touching the beach I jumped out, when I was greatly struck at the change that had come over my young cousin in the three or four hours during which we had been separated. His manner was as quiet and self-possessed as ever, but there seemed a certain suppressed joy about his whole demeanour which I had never before noticed, although now I could imagine, without difficulty, from what cause this exhilaration arose. He had seen his father, and knew that he was no longer a miserable convict at the mercy of hard-hearted and relentless officials; and although little Paul had left Siberia when quite a child, he remembered enough of the wretchedness throughout the vast penal waste to rejoice that the innocent victim of despotic tyranny had escaped from the hands of his persecutors.

"It was all as I foretold, Frank," said the boy, when he had drawn me out of earshot of the gig's crew. "My father is here, and I have passed the last two hours in his company. He had almost persuaded himself that I was

drowned, so strongly did Irmac insist on that fate having befallen me—*us*,” and the boy coloured ; but I felt no jealousy that the giant Siberian’s thoughts should be all centred in his little charge, and contain no superabundant pity to be wasted on me. “Still he could not, after closely questioning Irmac, regard our fate as decided, and the more so as he thought that the Power above which had laid so heavy a cross on him as exile, and the loss of his devoted wife, would listen to his ceaseless prayers, and spare the boy that *she* had left behind her. But he is longing to see you, Frank, and after I have told Mr. Duncan the news I have gathered, we will all go and visit my poor father. Fancy, Frank, it is fifteen months since he saw the face of any white man except Irmac, and he can hardly be called one.”

“The best news you can give our gallant commander,” I broke in, “is about the pirate, for he expects great things now that our Siberian giant is run to earth.”

“And he shall have it,” remarked the lad quietly ; “but let us hurry on board, and then we shall get back the sooner. My father is having reindeer venison and fish prepared for the whole crew.”

How curious it sounded to hear little Paul

talking so quietly of 'his father' in that remote and solitary region! His father—my uncle! It seemed almost incredible, and the surprising train of circumstances which had led to this happy reunion only fully struck me as we were skimming swiftly over the water in the gig, and I became more conscious of the light that danced on my cousin's quiet face.

"Welcome, Maldon," cried Mr. Duncan, even before we shot alongside; "but where is the big chap that Powerscourt has been telling me about? Why did you not bring him on board. I expect wonders from such a faithful fellow."

"And you shall not be disappointed, Mr. Duncan. Come below, and I will tell you everything."

To relate verbatim a conversation that lasted for at least two hours would be as irksome to me as it would be tedious to you lads to read it. Our commander's curiosity led to many wanderings from the path of straightforward narrative, but I will give him the credit of being animated by nothing but gratitude to Paul, through whose means a large sum of money was about to be put not only into the pockets of the needy lieutenant, but into those of every officer and man belonging to the *Vigilant* and *Fantôme*.

The first thing of which Paul informed us was

of such importance, and of so gratifying a nature, that our commander insisted on producing a rum-bottle and drinking a health to the success of the new enterprise which now lay before the *Fantôme*. Before mentioning it I must try back to the time of Irmac's disappearance from Shoreham.

It appears that the fishermen who had asserted that the Siberian was seen by them on the fore-castle of a Bering Strait whaler were perfectly right—they had seen and he had recognized them. The poor fellow, maddened by grief at our loss, and probably rendered doubly despondent by the alcohol to which he flew for relief, became possessed with the idea that the fault was entirely his, and that he should return at once to Siberia for the purpose of confessing his shortcomings to No. 458, and receive submissively such blame or punishment as the exile—now childless through his culpable neglect—should think fit to award. That such an idea should have entered the giant's brain is sufficient proof of the simplicity of his character where his fidelity was concerned, though he was cunning enough in other respects, as the concealment of the letter containing proofs of Paul's identity will already have shown.

This resolved upon, the next thing was to

reach Siberia, and the shortest way to effect this seemed offered by a whaler, bound for Bering Sea, which he had accidentally heard was then undergoing repairs at Gosport. Thither the determined fellow had walked, and on presenting himself was gladly engaged by the skipper of the 'blubber-boat' as interpreter and harpooner.

Arrived at Bering Strait, the difficulty was to leave his ship, since no persuasion would have induced his captain to part with so valuable a hand. He was in the position of a thirsty wanderer, who, standing on the precipitous brink of a cañon, hears the sweet murmur of the stream beneath, and yet knows that no drop of the precious fluid will ever pass his parched lips. He was in sight of frozen Asia, and yet was unable to reach it.

But a *deus ex machinâ* soon appeared in the shape of the pirate schooner, which bore down one fine day upon the whaler and stripped her of the few valuable furs which the captain had obtained from the natives. Now Irmac saw his chance, and at once volunteered to join the marauders, with whom he remained throughout their predatory trip, returning in the schooner to the creek where she was laid up during the winter months.

"Now, Mr. Duncan," said little Paul, when we

had arrived at this point, "Irmac remained with those fellows during the whole winter, and only left in the spring when travelling over the mountains became possible ; and he tells me that their plunder has not been sold to the Chinese, as we thought, but is stored up in a hiding-place at the head of the inlet in which the pirate winters. To this place he will cheerfully guide us, and the furs gathered there must, according to his account, be of very great value. He considers that the schooner has started on her yearly trip long before this,—even before we arrived at the Commander Islands,—and that the frigate is bound to fall in with and capture her. Thus, sir, it only remains with you to close with his offer and break up the stronghold of these ocean robbers."

"We'll sail to-morrow," cried the lieutenant, with enthusiasm ; "but go on with your story, Maldon."

Paul next proceeded to relate how Irmac had made the dangerous and lonely journey through the ranges, forests, and swamps of Siberia, until he had encountered the wild tribe over whom he had formerly wielded supreme authority. To his great joy the faithful fellow found the poor convict, No. 458, still with them, in his old capacity of skin collector, and at the exile's

feet he poured forth his self-accusations and penitence. Close questioning, as was mentioned above, elicited that the worst was not really known to honest Irmac, and all hope did not forsake the breast of the lonely exile.

And another good stroke befell Irmac. Most monarchs or potentates with whom history makes us acquainted are readily and quickly forgotten by the fickle multitude, however just and paternal their rule, if they have the misfortune to be absent from their realm for any length of time. The wise Ulysses and the brave Cœur-de-Lion may be cited as well-known examples of this rule; but with our Siberian it was just the reverse, and his return was hailed with rapturous acclamation by the entire tribe, except the new wizard, who saw his power slipping away. Under this man their hunts had been very poor, and his tricks were stale and unprofitable after the brilliant strokes of genius to which Irmac had accustomed them. So this unhappy impostor was given to understand that it would be better for his health if he joined some other tribe, and Irmac was installed in the vacant place with even more than his former authority.

But with the supposed loss of little Paul the poor fellow had grown moody and disconsolate,

whilst constant fretting had a weakening effect even upon his herculean frame. Although resuming all his former buoyancy and skill when compelled to put forth his powers for the edification of his savage surroundings, Irmac at other times brooded incessantly over the past, recalling each incident of his escape to England, or his sojourn beneath my father's roof at Shoreham, and his mind ever dwelling on the golden-haired lad who had been intrusted to his care by the gentle lady who slept beneath the pendant birch tree, her summer lullaby the murmurs of the rippling brook, her winter covering the pure and spotless snow. He loved to seek the convict's hut and to relate every particular of the boy's life, his disposition, his quaint sayings—doubly quaint when rendered by poor Irmac!—his quiet courage. This was some consolation for the faithful Cossack; could it be the same for the bereaved father? Hardly, I think, unless a spark of hope had still burnt bright in the breast of the latter.

And then came yet another change in Irmac, one that he was able eventually to gratify. He pined for the sea, for the grand, salt-laden, health-bestowing breeze that came fresh and pure from its bosom, and he wearied of the monotonous forest, whose giant trunks seemed

to hem him in and oppress him with their sombre rigidity. Determined to see again the element he loved, the Siberian caused the tribe to hunt in the direction of the coast, when he happened to hear from some wandering Tschuktschis of the verdant little island to which a happy chance, at a later period, conducted the *Fantôme*. This spot, he learned, was never visited by the Russians, and was even thought to be unknown to them, and there the idea first occurred to him to retire to this asylum with my father and such of the tribe as chose to follow him, together with their herds of deer, and to devote themselves to fur-hunting and barter on their own account, in place of slaving for an exacting Government, who bestowed nothing whatever in return for the heavy tax that they laid upon the natives.

Most of the Koriaks agreed to follow the destinies of their leader and his white friend; the remainder attached themselves to other branches of their race, and when, in due course, the Government Inspector came to demand the annual tale of furs, he found the encampment abandoned, the tribe extinct, and no sign of the convict, Number 458. Little or no inquiry was made, and the real position of affairs never guessed at. The exile might turn up at some

future date, and, if not, it was of little consequence, since there were thousands of his class already in the country, and their number was yearly increasing, thanks to the profligate woman who wielded the Russian sceptre.

So Irmac and his tribe had betaken themselves to the island, where they built a good hut for their white companion, and smaller ones for themselves. Under their wizard's instructions they soon transferred their skill in river-boating and fishing to the sea, and by means of barter had acquired a considerable store of peltry from the natives on the mainland, with whom they were in open communication during the summer. These they were anxious to exchange for firearms, ammunition, axes, and other necessities, when the *Fantôme* put in an appearance.

And I now come to the unfortunate mistake that resulted in the untimely death of poor Rurick.

You lads will remember that we had employed the wreck of an old Siberian trader to alter the appearance of the *Fantôme*, so as not to alarm the pirate until her chances of escape were hopeless. Our men also had let their beards grow, and in the fantastic rig which most of them had adopted were hardly to be

distinguished from the rude adventurers who had carried havoc amongst the miserable Aleuts.

Now to Irmac, whose nautical training had made him conversant with vessels and their rigs, this disguise had been apparent from the moment that daylight had revealed us at anchor off the island, and he had at once jumped to the conclusion that we were a Russian war-ship bent on reducing the tribe to further servitude, and probably punishing them for quitting the mainland. The entire store of furs, so laboriously collected, would be confiscated to the last pelt, their reindeer slaughtered, their dried fish destroyed, and most probably their village burnt; whilst in addition to these calamities they would assuredly lose Number 458, whose presence in their midst they had come to regard as a pledge of good luck. So the islanders resolved unanimously on resistance, and every movement of the schooner was anxiously watched by keen eyes posted in the recesses of the wood.

When Paul and I landed, the brushwood on either side was lined with marksmen who, armed only with the rude Siberian musket, can put a bullet through the head of a sable at one hundred yards. What could we have done against them? At the first fire we and every man in the gig's crew would have fallen lifeless.

Both Paul and Irmac always assert, and fully believe, that the poor bear winded the latter, and broke out of the boat in his anxiety to meet his old master. The Siberian recognized the animal at once—on the same principle, I suppose, that a shepherd knows each member of his flock, although to the uninitiated they are as much alike as so many grains of oats—and rushing from the covert had given Rurick the order to halt and stand up which the poor creature had so faithfully obeyed. Then the mischief happened, for some of the more superstitious of the tribe regarded the animal as an evil being sent forward by the enemy to bewitch and frighten them, and under this impression they considered its death as necessary to their own preservation ; hence the fatal shots that took away poor Rurick's life, and lost the crew of the *Vigilant* the best pet that a ship's company ever had.

As you know, little Paul had recognized Irmac and given the gig's crew orders to stack their muskets, whilst at the frantic entreaties of the poor bewildered Siberian the natives in ambush had remained motionless, and afterwards had withdrawn quietly to the village, and it was not until later that we learnt how near we had been to finding our skulls perforated by Koriak bullets.

After I had returned to the schooner with the gig, leaving my cousin and his new-found retainer beside the body of the dead bear, little Paul was taken to the village and ushered into the presence of the father who had almost believed himself childless.

Of what occurred at that meeting I can give no record, for such occasions are too sacred to bear investigation, and have their tender mysteries unfolded to the world. I never spoke to Paul of those two hours when he was closeted with the exile, neither did he ever refer to it until long years had passed away, and when Number 458 had been laid beside the wife he loved so well. You boys can fill up this blank for yourselves, can imagine what happened; and then you will cease to wonder why that look of intense joy was visible on the face of my young cousin despite the miserable end of poor faithful Rurick. That he sorrowed greatly for the noble brute I know, but such grief could hardly be of long duration in the face of the exceeding joy which was to follow. Gratitude to God for His infinite mercy and compassion filled the hearts of those two beings—so closely related, so widely parted hitherto!—and in the great joy of their reunion all minor troubles were swallowed up.

The crew of the *Fantôme* were poor Rurick's chief mourners. Irmac would have stripped the hide from the faithful beast and presented it to his young master as a perpetual remembrance of his favourite, but little Paul steadily objected to the carcase suffering any degrading mutilation. As the dear old chap lived, and as he died, so was his huge form laid to rest beneath the clean white sand whereon he fell. Except a couple of ship-keepers the whole crew of the *Fantôme*, and the entire tribe of savages amongst whom the poor beast had passed his cubhood, were present when his body was hidden from sight, and I may add that I have seen many of my fellow-men lowered in their narrow home with less manifestations than were evinced when the sand covered this great, clumsy, playful, loving beast.

One of the 'Queer Chums' of this narrative has played his little part, and has returned to the dust from which all flesh has sprung. Have I succeeded in awakening your interest in him—in both?

Poor Rurick!





CHAPTER XIX.

HOMeward BOUND.

I HAVE witnessed some curious scenes in my life, but never anything so extraordinary as the conduct of these wild untutored Koriaks on recognizing little Paul as the child with whom their wizard had taken so unceremonious a departure, leaving them at the mercy of a vodki-swilling old impostor, who wasn't worth his broken victuals. They thronged round the lad; they howled about him; they capered like demons; they turned somersaults; they linked arms and danced in magic circle round and round him; they wrung his hands until the wrist-joints were stiff; they laughed over him; they sobbed over him as though their simple hearts would break. This was the sterner part of the tribe. The ladies—young and old—did all of this and more, for they insisted on rubbing noses until my poor cousin looked as

though an influenza had held him tight for a month, during which he had been denied the ministrations of anything more comforting than a rough cotton handkerchief.

And Irmac! Never was a human being so completely changed in a few hours. He sung snatches of 'God save the King'—an accomplishment learned in the tap-room of the 'Sussex Pad'—to a tune which the composer of our national anthem would have failed to recognize, for he interspersed rattling capstan choruses in the most solemn parts. He indemnified himself for the recent loss of appetite by eating so voraciously that he seemed to expand beneath our very gaze; but whether singing, eating, or drinking, the eyes of the faithful fellow never quitted little Paul for more than a minute at a time, and he followed his new-found master like his shadow. His authority over the tribe was always great, but recent events had made him omnipotent, since the simple natives believed that by speaking to dying Rurick their wizard had changed us from Russian enemies, with larcenous designs on their peltry, into friends who would help and protect them. This was their firm conviction which nothing could shake, and Irmac was regarded with increased awe in consequence. They were perfect children

in their loves, hatreds, and superstition, these wandering tribes of frozen Asia, and friend Irmac was only one degree removed from them in these respects, especially in the wonderful quickness with which the opposite moods of joy and sorrow would succeed each other in their breasts. The huge Siberian would be roaring out some jovial sea song, with his jaws still busied on a junk of reindeer venison, when, in the midst of his mirth, the thought of poor Rurick would obtrude itself, and the great fellow would cease his bacchanalian stave to burst into a flood of tears, finished up by a most lugubrious howl, in which every Koriak within earshot would immediately join, the masticating process and the absorption of the venison proceeding apace the while. Then the ditty would be resumed with redoubled emphasis. A queer people, in truth !

On seeing my poor Aunt Olga's husband, I was at once enabled to detect the source from whence little Paul had derived his courtly manners and polished self-possession. The ease and grace with which Number 458 received Mr. Duncan were worthy of the best traditions of the polished Russian Court in which my unfortunate uncle had for so long moved as one of its principal ornaments.

That evening will always remain in my memory. Within doors the homespun and fur-clad convict was entertaining us with well-bred ease, listening intently to the flow of talk from the lieutenant, who dearly loved to hear his own tongue wagging, and leading up to fresh subjects by questions adroitly suggested rather than bluntly put.

Think of the dreary blank these years of exile must have been to the high-spirited young officer, dragged from the lap of luxury and plunged into utter, hopeless misery! Fancy being torn from the culture of a capital, and consigned to a prison where no breath of what is passing in the outer world can penetrate; where dynasties may change or die out—ay, where nationalities may be swept away, leaving nothing but a name to baffle the historian of the future—and yet no ripple from the overwhelming wave disturb the frozen monotony of those barren shores! Let those who grumble at hard work reflect on the torment, the misery of forced inaction, and a stagnation where the mental appetite has no more nourishing sustenance than the bitter memories of the past—harder of assimilation than Altai porphyry.

Outside my uncle's hut were gathered the crew of the *Fantôme*, their every want supplied

by the thoughtful Koriaks, who, under Irmac, fraternized with the new-comers. It was pretty to hear our fellows trolling out some jolly chorus, and to watch Prince Loriskoff—I shall call him convict no more—beating time dreamily with his fingers, whilst Irmac, by the pine bonfire around which the singers were seated, plunged boldly into the stirring melody, to the intense delight and wonder of the tribe, who viewed each new accomplishment of their wizard with undisguised admiration. It was touching, too, to observe how little Paul and his father would steal affectionate glances at each other, and how the dark load of care and sorrow on the brow of the latter seemed to grow lighter every hour.

Before returning to the schooner, it was arranged that Irmac and ten of the best hunters in the tribe should come on board the *Fantôme* on the following morning, and accompany us to the inlet which contained the pirate's stronghold. These skilful woodsmen would guide our fellows over a mountain-pass by which means we could select the most propitious moment for an attack; since the rascals had little cause to dread danger from the landward side, and the *Fantôme*, by running into a neighbouring creek, would have remained unseen and aroused no suspicion. Our enterprise ended, we were to return to

Duncan Island, as it was unanimously named, land the natives who had assisted us, and then sail in quest of the *Vigilant*, to report our doings, and to find, as we hoped, that she had captured the piratical schooner. Both Prince Loriskoff and Irmac were to remain on the island until Sir Edward Douglas had been communicated with. Jolly Mr. Duncan was unceasing in his efforts to induce the exile to make certain of his freedom by moving to the *Fantôme* there and then, but my uncle was an officer himself, and his high sense of honour showed him that the good-natured lieutenant might be censured for an act which his superior, Sir Edward, might perform with impunity.

Our descent upon the pirate stronghold was uneventful in the way of adventures, but as pretty a *coup* as ever was accomplished from a pecuniary point of view. Taken completely by surprise, the men in charge made no resistance, and the hold of the *Fantôme* was soon completely filled with bales of fur of the most valuable description. Lucky was it for us that Irmac and his sharp-eyed hunters were there to aid us in our selection, otherwise we should surely have cast aside some of the richest peltry, and taken skins of less value in its place. Having loaded the schooner, and allowed each of our Koriaks

to make up a bundle for himself, we burnt the remaining furs, with the building which contained them, and demolished the headquarters of the piratical crew. After this we returned to Duncan Island, and then started in quest of the *Vigilant*, with the assurance to Prince Loriskoff that our absence would be of short duration.

In that foggy and cheerless sea it is not so easy to pick up a consort, but a rendezvous had been agreed upon, a certain latitude and longitude, where the frigate would make her appearance once a week. Thither we repaired, and in due time the lofty spars of the old *Vigilant* were towering above us, while the *Fantôme* was bobbing and tumbling under her lee like a little girl curtseying to some hooped and bedizened lady.

Mr. Duncan at once went on board, and in a few minutes a hail from the frigate was heard calling little Paul and me to join him. The news of the enormous booty we had secured, and in which, of course, the entire crew of the *Vigilant* shared, had run like wild-fire round the lower deck, together with the death of poor Rurick, and the large share borne by little Paul in acquiring this treasure. As the skiff in which we were seated neared the frigate, I noticed that her nettings were lined with the heads of the

crew, peering down upon us as happened three years before when we were picked up in the English Channel.

In the very joy of his heart, little Paul took off his cap and waved it aloft in greeting to some of our messmates, whose faces he could distinguish.

In return, every hat fore and aft the frigate was in motion, and a hoarse voice shouted, "Three cheers for our little Rooshian Prince, messmates!"

Before the words were finished the lower rigging and nettings were black with figures, whilst from a hundred throats burst forth round after round of British cheers that must have reached the very seals slumbering on the Pribyleff group.

I gave the order to the men to cease pulling, and little Paul stood up in the stern-sheets bare-headed, pale, and with twitching lips—for the roar of applause from men such as those goes straight to the bottom of the heart, my lads!—but with joy dancing in his blue eyes.

Suddenly, as the cheers were dying away, there arose another voice, hoarser than the last, and tremulous with emotion.

"One more for his chum, shipmates," cried the old captain of the forecastle; "for his chum and for ours. A last cheer for poor old Rurick!"

It is difficult to say whether any vestige of joy was to be heard in the low subdued shout that arose at the name of their lost favourite; but after directing the men to give way again, I glanced at little Paul, who had resumed his seat. His pale face was buried in both hands, and his chest was heaving painfully.

No, Rurick has not been forgotten by his chum, and never will be, I think.

* * * * *

My story, boys, is drawing to a close; indeed there remains little more than to gather up the threads of this narrative, and give a few parting explanations regarding the personages whom I have presented to you in these pages.

On hearing Mr. Duncan's report, and ascertaining that Prince Loriskoff was on the island, Sir Edward took Paul and me on board the frigate, leaving the schooner to watch for the pirate, and sailed for that eventful spot. There one of the Koriak fishermen reported the wreck of a large vessel to be still visible on a submerged reef several leagues to the northward, and a visit to this place showed us that the sea-battered ribs were those of the pirate schooner. What became of her ruffianly crew we never learnt, but Irmac declares they made their way to the mainland and met with the punishment they deserved at the hands of the Tschuktschis.

There was now nothing further to detain the *Vigilant* in those inclement seas, so in company with the *Fantôme* the frigate sailed for England, where she arrived in due time, having on board, as the guest of the captain, Prince Loriskoff, late Number 458, and as a playfellow for the crew in the place of poor Rurick, Irmac the giant Siberian. We had considerable trouble in inducing the Koriaks to part with their redoubtable wizard, but this was overcome when Sir Edward bought their entire stock of peltry, giving them so much ammunition and so many muskets, tomahawks, knives, and other useful articles in exchange, that he must have spoiled the market completely for the next customer. It was also arranged that an English Bering Strait whaler should be asked to call at Duncan Island every year, so that the inhabitants might barter their furs on fair terms.

Our return to England was quite unexpected, and it was midnight when four of us—Prince Loriskoff, little Paul, Irmac, and myself—arrived in two post-chaises with steaming horses at the door of Gorham Hall, my father's new place in Sussex. How he received the three Shoreham truants I leave you to imagine, as also how true was the sympathy conveyed in the lingering grasp with which he welcomed his exiled brother-in-law.

And for the latter also fortune changed with the most unexpected rapidity. My father, to whom the Russian Ambassador at the English Court was known, found means to tell him of the cruel injustice which had been committed on the exile, when within a month the man who only a year before had been a homeless wanderer, dependent on the charity and compassion of savages, was once more aide-de-camp to an Emperor, with a higher military rank, and the vast lands and wealth of his family restored. It appears that he was the victim of some private enmity on the part of the late Czar's murderers, and that Alexander I. had imagined him dead.

My little cousin Paul never went to sea again under the ensign of old England, but passing over to Russia with his father, joined the Imperial Navy, in which he attained high rank, but was not much afloat, being chiefly employed in positions of diplomatic trust, a branch for which his presence of mind, courteous bearing, and acute intellect particularly fitted him.

One of Prince Loriskoff's first acts, on his restoration to favour, was to beg that Duncan Island should be given to him and his heirs for ever. This request was readily granted, and from that moment Irmac's cup of happiness was full, for he was the agent through whom the new proprietor communicated with the island. Under

wise rules the Koriaks flourished exceedingly, and were rejoiced by the occasional presence of their old wizard ; but Prince Loriskoff had built a church, and obtained the services of an active and conscientious pope (priest), who sternly forbade all heathen mummary, and who turned his savage flock into nominal Christians at any rate, and the rising generation into sincere believers.

In my intervals of active service I used frequently to visit my uncle and Paul at St. Petersburg, and on one occasion we accompanied Irmac on his biennial visit to Duncan Island—accompanied him, that is to say, as far as the valley in which my poor Aunt Olga lies sleeping beneath the splendid tomb which her sorrowing husband had caused to be erected, and beneath which he also now lies by her side.

I stuck to the Service and got on fast, having the good luck to gain my lieutenancy at the glorious battle of Trafalgar, where Nelson, the hero of the nation, fell.

Nor was he the only brave man that England had to mourn, for that eventful day lost her, amongst many others, Sir Edward Douglas—‘Fighting Ned,’ as his crew had named him.

Like his immortal leader he fell in the hour of victory, with his bays bright and unwithered.

Dearly as I loved him, boys, I could have wished him no better end.

And what about the 'Sussex Pad,' gruff old Captain Zebedee, jolly Jack Cheesman, and the *Fly-by-night*, you will naturally ask?

When I returned in the *Vigilant*, the whole association had been broken up, and its members scattered. Clawsby Latimer had been too quick for them, and though he was baffled on the occasion of Joe Wrigglesworth's treachery, yet the look-out he kept destroyed the 'Pad' as a place of concealment for smuggled goods. Through my father, Skipper Zeb obtained the command of a fruiterer trading to the Azores, and Jack Cheesman conducted his business on more moral lines, though it was never without a sigh and a wry face that he paid the duty on a barrel of brandy.

Now you have, in black and white, the history of your old grandfather's early life, and if all goes well I shall take you to Paris in the autumn, and there you shall see the hero of this story—little Paul.

If the perusal of these pages helps in any measure to make you God-fearing, brave, manly boys, who love your Queen and your country and hate the devil, then your old grandad has not taken up his pen in vain.



CONCLUSION.

WRITTEN BY REAR-ADMIRAL SIR GEORGE
POWERSCOURT, BART., K.C.B.

IT was in the autumn of the year 1848, when I, the eldest of the boys for whom the above narrative was written, and two of my brothers, were taken over to Paris and presented to the 'little Paul' whose adventures and character my grandfather's story had made us so familiar with.

We found him at the Embassy—he represented Russia—where his hearty welcome and quiet courtesy immediately put us at our ease, and made us oblivious of the oppression created by the vast extent of the large untenanted salon.

"And you were poor Rurick's chum," remarked my youngest brother, who was blessed

with unlimited self-possession, "and saw him kill the Frenchman?"

"So you've been telling tales out of school, old Frank," he replied, laying his hand affectionately on my grandfather's shoulder. "Yes, little man," he continued, turning to his questioner, "and I dare say your grandad has given me a great deal more credit than I deserve. Suppose you all come this evening and have tea with another old friend, whilst we two ancient mariners fight our battles over again in the quiet of my study?"

I—for I am naturally dense—was puzzled as to who the 'old friend' might be, but my younger brother, the imp of supernatural sharpness, instantly asked, "Irmac?"

"Yes, poor old Irmac, who will be delighted to yarn with you by the fathom. He's becoming very shaky, Frank, and I fear won't last out many more winters."

After our visit to Paris came to an end, I saw no more of Prince Loriskoff until 1867, when he came express from St. Petersburg to attend the funeral of my dear old grandfather. He took no part in the Crimean War, but retired to his estates and died, a very old man, in 1875, surrounded by his descendants to the fourth generation.

With this information the narrative which my grandfather aptly named 'Queer Chums' may be brought to a close.

(Signed) GEORGE POWERSCOURT.

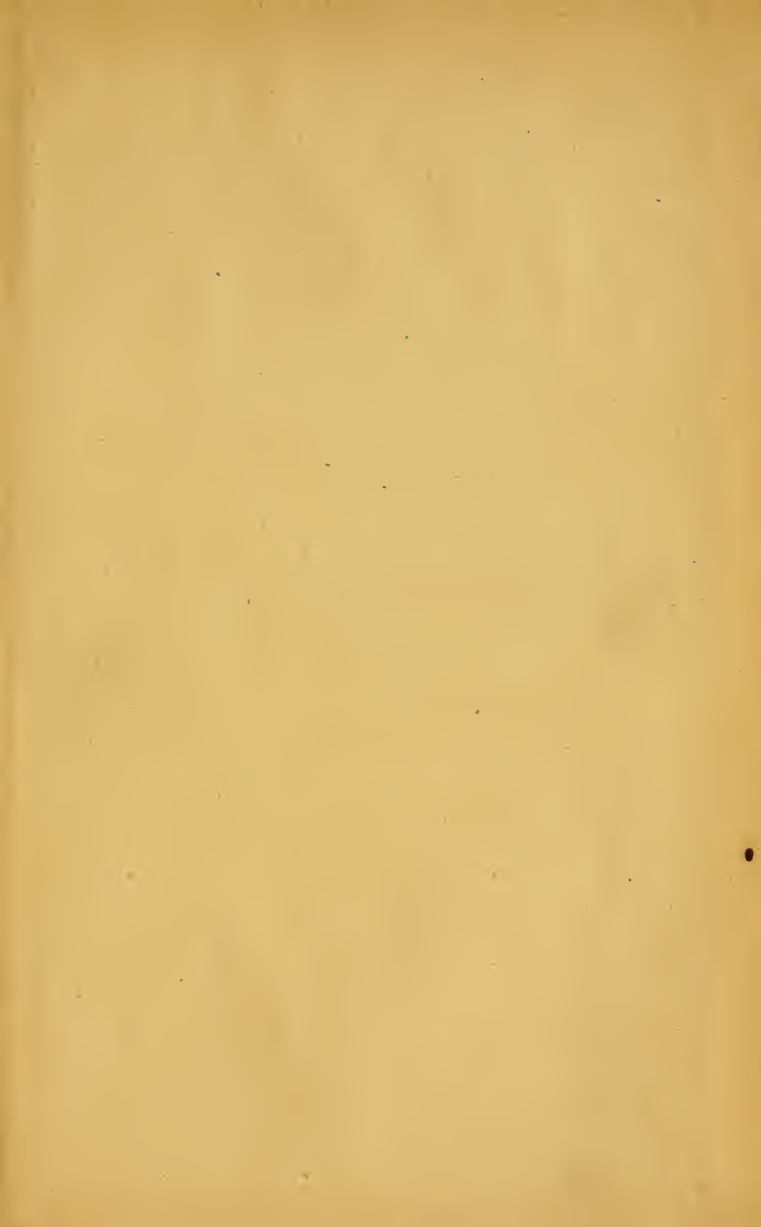
Gorham Hall, Sussex.

April 1887.

THE END.

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